

HEINEMANN'S

INTERNATIONAL-LIBRARY

EDITED BY

EDMUND-GOSSE

NIobe

JONAS · L

PT
8911
N5
1897

Cornell University Library

THE GIFT OF

Henry J. Patten

A. 29.17.36

30 / 11 / 14

Cornell University Library
PT 8911.N5 1897

Niobe /



3 1924 026 350 474

olin



Cornell University Library

The original of this book is in
the Cornell University Library.

There are no known copyright restrictions in
the United States on the use of the text.

NIOBE

Heinemann's International Library.

Edited by EDMUND GOSSE.

Crown 8vo, in paper covers, 2s. 6d., or cloth limp, 3s. 6d.

1. *IN GOD'S WAY.* From the Norwegian of BJÖRNSTJERNE BJÖRNSSON.
2. *PIERRE AND JEAN.* From the French of GUY DE MAUPASSANT.
3. *THE CHIEF JUSTICE.* From the German of KARL EMIL FRANZOS.
4. *WORK WHILE YE HAVE THE LIGHT.* From the Russian of COUNT LYOF TOLSTOI.
5. *FANTASY.* From the Italian of MATILDE SERAO.
6. *FROTH.* From the Spanish of DON ARMANDO PALACIO VALDÉS.
7. *FOOTSTEPS OF FATE.* From the Dutch of LOUIS COUPERUS.
8. *PEPITA JIMÉNEZ.* From the Spanish of JUAN VALERA.
9. *THE COMMODORE'S DAUGHTERS.* From the Norwegian of JONAS LIE.
10. *THE HERITAGE OF THE KURTS.* From the Norwegian of BJÖRNSTJERNE BJÖRNSSON.
11. *LOU.* From the German of BARON VON ROBERTS.
12. *DONA LUZ.* From the Spanish of JUAN VALERA.
13. *THE JEW.* From the Polish of JOSEPH I. KRASZEWSKI.
14. *UNDER THE YOKE.* From the Bulgarian of IVAN VAZOFF.
15. *FAREWELL LOVE!* From the Italian of MATILDE SERAO.
16. *THE GRANDEE.* From the Spanish of DON ARMANDO PALACIO VALDÉS.
17. *A COMMON STORY.* From the Russian of IVAN GONTCHAROFF.
18. *WOMAN'S FOLLY.* From the Italian of GEMMA FERRUGGIA.
19. *SIREN VOICES.* From the Danish of J. P. JACOBSEN.
20. *NIOBE.* From the Norwegian of JONAS LIE.

Each Volume contains a specially written Introduction by the Editor.

LONDON: W. HEINEMANN, 21 BEDFORD ST., W.C.

N I O B E

BY

JONAS LIE

TRANSLATED FROM THE NORWEGIAN

BY

H. L. BRÆKSTAD



LONDON
WILLIAM HEINEMANN

1897

[All rights reserved]

E.V.

~~1366~~

~~L7192~~

A.291736

INTRODUCTION

EARLY in the spring of 1874, the present writer happened to be the guest of the late head of the great Gyldendal house of publishers, the elegant and hospitable Mr. Frederik Hegel, in the classic parlour of his firm in Copenhagen. A clerk brought in, fresh from the press, the first copy of a new novel, on whose pale green paper cover was an engraving of a boat, in heavy weather, tacking outside a Norwegian promontory. "You shall take this with you, if you will," said Mr. Hegel, as he wrote my name with *venligst og ærbødigst fra Forlæggeren*, "and make acquaintance with Jonas Lie." "And who is Jonas Lie?" I asked. "He is a Norwegian," he answered, "like our friends Björnson and Ibsen, and, though comparatively few people know his name to-day, I predict that in ten years' time he will have more readers than any other Scandinavian writer." The prophecy has come true, at all events so far as Scandinavia itself is concerned. At this moment Jonas Lie is locally the most popular of the Northern novelists.

At the date I speak of Lie was already more than

forty years of age. Jonas Lauritz Edemil Lie was born on the 6th of November 1833, at Hougsund in the country parish of Eker, near Drammen, in the south of Norway. At the age of five he was removed to the port of Tromsø, in the Arctic regions, his father having been appointed sheriff of that town. There he remained until he was thirteen years old, enjoying an untrammelled childhood among the shipping of the little Nordland capital, and gaining acquaintance with the wild seafaring life which he was afterwards to describe in his early stories. He had a great wish as a boy to go to sea, and in 1846 he was sent to the naval station at Fredriksværn to become a cadet. His extreme near-sight unfitted him, however, for service, and after a few months' training, which was not lost on the future author of *The Commodore's Daughters*, he was sent to the Latin school at Bergen. There he remained until 1849. Two years later he went up to the University of Christiania, where Ibsen, Björnson, and Vinje were among his fellow students, and ultimately among his friends. While these young men, however, early showed their native bias towards literary production, Lie displayed no such inclination. He pursued his studies as a lawyer, took his degree in law in 1858, and presently settled down in practice as a solicitor in the small town of Kongsvinger. In 1860 he married his cousin Thomasine Lie, to whom he had long been attached.

Meanwhile the plays and stories of his early

contemporaries were making them famous. Lie was seized by a spirit of emulation, and at Christmas 1866 he published his first book, a volume of "Poems," in which the influence of Wergeland was strongly marked. In 1868, at the somewhat mature age of thirty-five, he gave up his professional career, and came to the capital to try his luck as a man of letters. His poems enjoyed no success and for the next two years Lie carried on a struggling existence as an obscure journalist. At the close of 1870 appeared his first story, *Den Fremsynte* ("The Man with the Second Sight"), a melancholy little romance of life in the Arctic part of Norway, the world of brief lustrous summers and age-long winters. This tale was written in the manner which Björnson had brought into fashion, but it showed original features of its own, both in treatment and in location. It was full of memories of the author's childish days in Tromsø. He was conscious, however, that these memories needed refreshing, and in 1871 he obtained a small travelling stipend from the State, which enabled him to make a journey through Nordland and Finmark. From these Arctic provinces he immediately betook himself to Rome.

Den Fremsynte was well received in Norway, and Lie was now assured of literary work. But neither in his short stories, *Fortællinger*, 1871, nor in the novel which followed them, *Tremasteren Fremtiden* ("The Three-master 'The Future'"), 1872, did he

achieve a complete success. *Tremasteren* was an attempt to give a realistic impression of life in the Arctic ports, but it is not artistically put together, and the movement of the tale is slack. At the age of forty, Jonas Lie was still far from being a distinguished man even in his own country. Yet as early as 1869 Björnson, speaking at a public meeting at Tromsø, had said of Lie: "His friends know that he only needs to dip the net down into himself to bring up a full catch." The image was an excellent one, for Lie's nature, during the varied experience of these apparently barren years, had been stocking itself, like a fish-pool, with every variety of living forms.

His first great book was that which appeared in 1874, and called forth from his publisher the personal expression of faith to which I have referred. The novel of *Lodsen og hans Hustru* ("The Pilot and his Wife") was written in a small mountain town in Italy. A comrade of those years has recorded that the composition of it was accompanied by so painful a nostalgia for the sea that Lie became almost ill with longing, and one summer day, throwing up his work, trudged many miles through the blazing heat that he might kneel for a few moments by the lapping Mediterranean, and wash his eyes and mouth in the waves. This intense devotion to the sea, and this pre-occupation with marine instincts, gave a peculiar character to *Lodsen og hans Hustru*, which is one of

the saltiest stories ever published ; it is odd to think that a book so full of cool foam and fresh wind should have been written in a hot Italian inland village. This admirable novel has appeared in two English versions, and has been translated into most of the languages of Europe. It deals with the adventures of the two homely folk who give it its name, and with life on the North Sea and in various tarry sea-port towns of Europe.

Lie's next venture was a drama in verse, called *Faustina Strozzi*, 1876, founded on a passage in recent Italian history. This is not regarded as a work of great importance. It really marks a crisis in the author's life. He was no longer satisfied with giving a romantic treatment to the seafaring life that he had learned to touch as a child. His ambition was to address a larger class of readers, with work produced on a more cosmopolitan basis. It was some time before he discovered that his talent did not lie in painting modern Italian life, nor even such Christiania manners as inspired his next two novels, *Thomas Ross*, 1878, and *Adam Schrader*, 1879. His next work was a comedy, *Grabow's Cat*, the only play Lie has brought out on the stage. In *Rutland* 1881, and *Gaa paa!* ("Go Ahead!"), 1882, he returned to his original field—sea-life in the Norwegian merchant-navy, gaining by these two books, for the first time, the ear of the great public.

But the true importance of Jonas Lie as a student of human nature, and as the constructor of a strong and original plot, was first exhibited by his powerful novel called *Livsslaven* ("The Slave for Life"), 1883, which dealt with the toils and pleasures of artisans in the Norwegian capital; this is a gloomy and pessimistic story of a smith's apprentice, with his struggles for existence and his ultimate final failure owing to the irresistible indulgence of a passionate physical instinct. *Livsslaven* achieved a very great success; it was realistic and modern in a certain sense and to a discreet degree, and it appealed, as scarcely any Norwegian novel had done before, to all classes of Scandinavian society. It was followed within a few months by *Familjen paa Gilje* ("The Family at Gilje"), another study of the sinister side of modern life, illuminated, however, by a genuine humour, an element which here made its appearance in Lie's works for the first time. Since 1883, Jonas Lie has published eight novels, *En Malström* ("A Whirlpool"), 1884; *Kommandörens Döttré* (The Commodore's Daughters), 1886, which has already appeared in the "International Library;": *Et Samliv* ("A Wedded Life,") 1887; *Maisa Jons*, 1888, the story of a sempstress; *Onde Magter* ("Evil Forces,") 1890; *Niobe*, 1894, which is here translated; *Naar Sol gaar ned* ("At Sunset") 1895; and *Dyre Rein*, 1896. He has also published in book-form a collection of eight short stories,

Otte Fortællinger, a new volume of poems, 1890; and a collection of twelve stories of seafaring life, called *Trold*, Christmas 1891.

Like so many of the leading writers of Norway, Jonas Lie has been mainly a voluntary exile from his fatherland. He left Norway in 1871, and, except for a visit which he paid to his country in 1882, he has lived abroad ever since. In 1875 he was decorated by the Norwegian government, and his friendship with Björnson was presently interrupted by a controversy on the propriety of accepting decorations. After leaving Italy Lie settled in North Germany, then removed to Berchtesgaden, in Bavaria, where he had a summer dwelling, his winters being spent in Paris. Not till 1893 did he return to Norway. This prolonged absence from home is the more remarkable because his books deal almost exclusively with local types and local manners—are not merely Norwegian, but provincially Norwegian. It is the characteristic of the later and greater works of Jonas Lie that in them he has presented to us clearer and simpler aspects of Norse life than any other author. Without reaching the intellectual passion of Ibsen or the romantic tenderness of Björnson, Lie comes really closer than either of these more inspired poets to the genuine life of the Norwegians of to-day. As Herman Bang reminds him, in the graceful essay of dedication which precedes Bang's volume of tales called *Under*

Aaget ("Under the Yoke"), 1890, Jonas Lie has known how to present to us the solemn figures of the Fates, clad in the garments of to-day. He stands, as a novelist, with those minute and unobtrusive painters of contemporary manners who defy arrangement in this or that school. He is with Mrs. Gaskell or M. Ferdinand Fabre; he is not entirely without relation, in some of his books, to that old-fashioned favourite of the public, Fredrika Bremer. It would be a mistake to call him a great creative artist. He has slowly discovered his vocation, and late in life has secured an audience. His truthfulness, his simple pathos, his deep moral sincerity, have gradually conquered for him a place in the hearts of his countrymen and countrywomen which no one can dispute with him. His style, which is colloquial almost to a fault, presents certain peculiarities which the translator of *Niobe* has attempted to preserve. English readers may be pleased to read one of the most characteristic stories of a writer who is innocent of any "ism" and professes to teach no "gospel," but who is the best beloved of the living novelists of his fatherland.

In November 1893, Arne Garborg published *Jonas Lie, en Udviklingshistorie* (*Aschehoug: Christiania*), an eulogistic critical biography of our author.

EDMUND GOSSE.

NIOBE

I

THERE was a scene in the study. The doctor, pale with excitement, bounded from his chair into the middle of the room, as if about to execute the first steps of a *halling*.* He was crushing a letter in his hand, while two or three of the sheets belonging to it had been thrown on the table among his surgical instruments.

“If I only had him here, if I only had him here . . . ”

He looked up at the ceiling, and drew a deep breath.

“To have the impudence to come with such confounded stuff and nonsense !”

“Well, Borvig,” rejoined his wife, who was standing by the bookcase watching his movements, “I suppose we must put up a little with our children, while they grope about and find their way. Young

* The *halling* is one of the national dances of Norway.

people nowadays will have their rights—will go in for what they think will give them most happiness.”

“Put up with—put up with — — no—o.” He came close up to her, looked fixedly into her face, and said slowly, “No—o, Bente—I will—I will not put up with it.”

The quiet, grey eyes he encountered were firmer than his own. He had no intention of frightening or overawing her; he only wanted to reveal to her what was at the bottom of his heart, to let her clearly understand that no contradiction or persuasion, or any kind of reasoning whatever with him afterwards, when he had quieted down, would be of any use.

After a hurried walk round the room, during which he was apparently seeking an object on which he could vent his anger, he sat down again in his armchair.

“No—o, Bente!—this time he has run his head against a wall. He cannot get any farther—no—no—farther.”

He folded his hands with the sorrowful resignation of the man of intellect.

“First he tried the Church. . . . But that came to nothing. He had no longer any belief—pure and simple, such as they teach it at the university”

“Well, Borvig, we must respect him for that.”

“Pooh!—in my days they were not so particular to a point or two about one’s belief. . . . That cost him two and a half years’ study, and us three thousand crowns. But let that pass.— Then he tried philology and the roots of languages. There he felt himself a ‘coming discoverer.’ Wasn’t that so, Bente? The coming discoverer of ‘The road to the origin and life of mankind, from prehistoric times’ . . . he was ‘fired with the spirit of research,’—wrote about the fire of the investigator, as if he were cut out for a North-Pole explorer.— Oh yes, Bente! And instead of sobering him down a bit, you rather encouraged him. Everything was always to be on such a grand scale with him.”

“Do you think it was so wrong of me to encourage the lad? Endre’s nature is such, that he must always be high-strung to enable him to go on with his work at all.”

“Ah, indeed!—first of all a prophet—Endre the prophet!—and then Endre the discoverer! — — Ha, ha, ha!” laughed the doctor, shaking his head, and waving the letter above his head. “And then — — Endre the singer! — — Yes, by Heavens, he wants to be a singer!”

He jumped up, and held the letter before her.

“Here it is—I tell you, here it is,” he shouted. “He wants to sing, the fellow wants to sing—‘to captivate the world with the power of his tones,’” he repeated mockingly, swinging himself round, and

beginning to warble an operatic melody. He then stopped as if perplexed, the veins in his forehead swelling.

“I wish I were struck down dead!”

“God preserve you from your violent temper, Borvig; I wish you would rather lay hands on me as an outlet to your temper. I don’t suppose you would quite kill your wife?” she added, with a peculiar tenderness in her voice.

“Yes—then there would be no bread in the house . . . nothing but the bare empty walls to satisfy one’s hunger,” he burst out, as in a fit of anger and spite he began to follow up the idea. “To begin with, there would be no remittances every month.—Then he could sing . . . till his stomach shrieked with hunger like a posthorn—and go through the whole scale up to the high F. . . . Only there would be no dinner—no, none at all. . . . And then, perhaps, common sense would have a chance, and it would no longer be considered too degrading to think of such trivial items as dinner and supper. — — For, of course, it ought never to be mentioned in this house, that it was for the sake of such material commonplaces as earning one’s food that he went in for theology and philology. It was always with a higher object in view! I have never understood these high-flown arguments—they have always made me feel uncomfortable, as if a cat were in the room. . . . But you, Bente,

have been helping them all!—Always encouraging them in their high-flown ideals.”

“We are in a new age, Borvig. It is no longer so difficult to make your way in the world as in my youth, when you had only to take what offered itself and resign yourself to your fate.”

“Yes, they must search and sniff for ‘what will give them most happiness,’ as you so beautifully remarked. It has become the fashion to possess an ‘inner being, which must be saved’—they must first of all ascertain what kind of idle life would be most to their liking. It has become their holy duty to solve this.”

“You are wise and intelligent enough, Borvig; but you do not follow the times. You resist through sheer obstinacy.”

“Ah, ha!—indeed Ah, ah! Of course now he sacrifices himself for Art—the Art of Song!—is that not what it is called in the modern jargon?”

“My dear, do try and take things more quietly.”

“You buy boots—I swear you buy boots, Bente, to keep your feet warm,” he shouted, “and not to support the boot-trade. . . . Ugh! how I hate these arguments.”

He repeated these words over and over again, impatiently passing his hand across his massive forehead.

A pause ensued, during which his wife went

quietly towards him. Like a gentle lion-tamer she let her fingers glide soothingly through his hair.

"Yes, say you pity me, Bente; I have both the might and the right, but am not allowed to strike out in any direction for your confounded tender considerations and effeminacy. I tell you, I shall just die of it some day."

"If we could only agree to talk sensibly about it together, you would see, how much easier it would make things," said Mrs. Borvig, comforting him, now that the worst of the paroxysms seemed over.

"Four and twenty—four and twenty pages, full of silly phrases and stilted, imbecile conceit. None of the professors are, of course, even good enough to black his boots. The profession now produces only new broods of narrow-minded pedants every year, whose proper place is in Rome and Greece, and who go about like spectres haunting the world.— —And out of all the fume and smoke and all this bombastic brew comes the essence of it—now he wants to be a singer. Faugh!"

He accompanied this exclamation with a smack of the lips, and an affected, idiotic stare.

"No, my dear, his conscience will not give him rest if he is going to live on in the knowledge that he has 'betrayed his duty'—that's what he writes."

"My dear, can you not think of something else to torture and plague me with? Is it not the boy that we are both concerned about?"

“And then he cannot bear to have his future fettered in these narrow-minded professions—to be obliged to go about as a state-official at a quiet, jog-trot pace, everlastingly in the same spiritless routine; till one has completely forgotten that there exists anything which is called free will-inspiration.—You understand, Bente—will-inspiration?”

“Yes, my dear,—have your say! You must give vent to your feeling, I know.—I am so grieved for you.”

She tried to appease him by speaking to him in a soothing voice, but her face wore an anxious expression, as if something were brewing within her.

“He would look upon it as a degradation, he writes, if he became such an official—like a pivot in a piece of machinery.* Aha! you see, Bente, you are married to a pivot in a piece of machinery. . . . But if he thinks he will ever get a penny from me he — —” He threw the crumpled letter on the table.

“But we are agreed about one thing, Borvig,—we want to make the best we can of the boy . . . and a fear has grown upon me.” Here she bent over him greatly agitated, her voice falling to a whisper. “What if all this overwhelming feeling and sentiment in him should be the expression of an artistic nature? . . . Ah, Borvig—what if we

* In the country districts of Norway the parish doctors are appointed and paid by Government.

have urged and driven his talents into channels which are uncongenial to him?—I understand so little of it all—I can scarcely see through it. . . . He is of such a disposition that he must be at a high pitch in everything he goes in for . . . and we want, yes, we do want to do everything we can for the boy—that he may find his right vocation and not become unhappy,” she cried, with such earnest sincerity in her tones that the doctor at once felt he must be on his guard.

“Ah! I see; now he has become gifted with an artistic nature,” he burst out, jumping up from his seat. “I do believe she is going crazy as well—no—not a penny!”

He tore open the parlour door so violently, that the framework shook.

“Why, father!” a voice exclaimed.

It was that of his eldest daughter, Minka, eighteen years old, who stopped her exercises on the piano in her sudden fright.

“Oh, it’s nothing, my dear child,” he said irritably. “Only your brother Endre. He is going to give up philology and become a sing—er,”—he moaned despairingly, with a sweep of his hand towards the piano. “And your mother is beginning to ponder and worry herself about his artistic temperament already. . . .”

“But father,” demurred Minka, “if he really feels it is his calling.”

“ Calling—calling! I think the whole house must be ablaze with phrases! ”

“ But Endre has such a beautiful voice,” interposed Minka somewhat hesitatingly; “ when he is out at parties, they always press him to ”

“ Pshaw! these drawing-room talents that force themselves into publicity—I have known enough of them! Formerly all fools and good-for-nothings went to sea; but now they go in for art. . . . Endre has always gone about blowing his own trumpet, till he believes himself to be a personage of importance. And now he is going to amuse himself by disgracing his family.”

“ I don't see how there can be any disgrace in using one's own talents, father,” hazarded Minka vehemently.

The doctor turned angrily round to his wife :

“ It seems as if they had all taken leave of reality altogether. Disgrace disgrace what does it signify? Minka sits there and does not know, God help her, what it means disgrace! Mad ideas are very catching in a house, Bente! I have been reckoning that Endre, up to the present time, has used two years and a half to each of his freaks—what is it I call them?”—he stopped and lifted his arm with a stately gesture—“ of each of his great aims of life. Of course, nothing less than aims of his life. . . . Well—he shall at any rate have a plain answer. The whole thing is very

simple. Sing away for all I care, Mr. Endre—but, not one penny!"

// The study door slammed after him.

Everything went wrong that day. No sooner were the lamps lighted, than Kjel, the doctor's second and favourite son, came strolling in from the autumn rain and slush, with a cigar stump in his mouth.

He kept his top coat still buttoned up, and paced to and fro, deeply absorbed in thought, and petulantly chewing the end of his cigar. His appearance and manners were those of the smart business man.

After a turn or two round the room, he finished up his deliberations by throwing his cigar stump into the fire.

"A fellow is rather loth to trouble his father but there is no other way out of it, if I am not literally to throw money into the sea," he exclaimed. "You must help me, father, by putting your name to a bill for six hundred crowns."

Only a creak was heard from the arm-chair.

"I have ordered seventy loads of timber for sawing at the mill."

"Of course, of course—when one does business in such a wholesale way. . . ."

"Well, the saw-mill cannot possibly be kept standing, so that the good people in the district may get the idea that I am in want of both capital and custom—and all the timber for sawing goes down to

Johansen's mill—just at the time—the critical moment, so to speak, when the business should show that we can stand the competition.”

No answer came, so Kjel felt the necessity of filling up the pause.

“That confounded Johansen! that he should think of starting just in the same line of business. If one begins making reels, for instance, all the others are sure to follow. I ought to have bought that little waterfall of his at the time; but then I had no money. I saw it, of course, but would not press you for more.”

The unpleasant silence continued.

“Well, you have security for your money in the timber, or rather in the planks and deals, so I have no scruples in asking you, for once, to back a bill for me—but—,” he paced up and down the room with a superior air; “I do not like it. Besides you have already advanced me money for the mill although, of course, you have security for it.—But—if you should be willing to do your second offspring the favour,—otherwise I must go somewhere else and get it somehow.—I could, of course, manage — —”

“It is very kind of you, Kjel, to think of your father on such an occasion,” the voice from the table replied dryly. Behind the green lamp shade could be seen the doctor's grey hair and, now and then, a glimpse of the gold spectacles over the sharp nose.

“ Well, well, father,—I must see about helping myself, I suppose.”

“ I am not going to back any bills,—no one shall see my name on such papers.”

“ Good Heavens, my dear father, no one is forcing you to do it.”

“ You got me to invest most of the little I have in your mill. It was the only way to get you started. You could not get on, you said, until you had something you could manage yourself. . . . But then, you must know, there can be no question of my finding any capital for carrying on the business.”

“ But, my dear, dear father,—” here Kjel patted the doctor lovingly on the shoulder,—“ that is the reason I mentioned it quite casually to you—in case it were possible, you see—for the space of three months . . . but had I thought it would in any way affect your good temper, then— —. So we won't talk about it. . . . Let it be as if it were unsaid, my dear father. You know I can manage six hundred crowns. I wish to goodness I had never spoken about it to you. Let it be forgotten, won't you ? ” added Kjel, preparing to go.

“ But Kjel, why can't you close the mill for that time ? ”

Kjel went on buttoning up his coat and adjusting the collar.

“ You don't follow the times, father—”

“ What ! ” exclaimed the doctor jumping up ex-

citedly. "Are you also going to begin with that?"

"Well, as a doctor you may be a very clever man. But as for business;—no, that's a different thing!—For instance you have no idea of what puffing means nowadays. You would go and build a saw-mill and let it stand idle. That might have done in former days. But now, in the midst of the struggle and competition with Johansen, to close the mill into the bargain.— — Yes, indeed, and then Johansen's mill would be the only one at work within a dozen miles. That would indeed be a fine stroke of business! No, father—you have got to advertise yourself—you have to understand that and know how to make the most of it; you have at times to throw dust in people's eyes. Well, here, fortunately, it does not cost anything, so it is hardly worth discussing."

"H'm, you are not going into the parlour, I see. . . ."

"No, I have an invitation to Simonsen's to-night, to play cards."

"The cashier's?"

"Yes,—and there I'll get what I want without any ado, if only he has got it," said Kjel in an off-hand way.

The doctor stretched out his hand towards the lamp and lifted the shade.

"Now listen, Kjel—if I authorise you to take the

six hundred crowns out of your mother's savings-bank account. . . . I only say, *if* I did that—are you sure, I can have the money back here,” said the doctor bringing his hand down with force on the table, “in three, no, let us say for safety in four months, that will be in March? . . . Do you think,—are you quite sure, that you can do that, my boy; quite sure and certain?”

“No, indeed; the mill might by that time be washed away by the floods, or be burnt down—or the world might have come to an end or something of that sort,” he answered peevishly.

“Well, well, you shall have my authority to draw out the amount for this time only. But there must be no more of that sort of thing, you understand, however plausible matters may appear.”

The doctor remained seated in thought, while the son walked to and fro in front of the writing table.

“It's just as well I need not trouble Simonsen about any loan; in fact, it's quite a relief, father. One can finger one's hand at cards so much more freely, eh father? ha, ha, ha!” laughed Kjel, feeling greatly relieved;—“they cheated Johansen last autumn, anyhow, over at least thirty dozen of timber—a case of dry-rot, every blessed stick of them. And now—ha, ha, ha!—the stacks of deals are standing down there at the mill like a pile of bleached bones. He believes everything you tell

him. And my hopes partly rest on that ; in fact, I am counting on it.—That's what we call profitable items, father."

The doctor lay back in his chair, stretching his legs and his hands buried in his pockets,—conscious of a certain pleasurable feeling of admiration for his son.

"If it were a smart rival I had to compete with, then . . . ha, ha, ha! I wonder if he could be prevailed upon to take some more of that same dry stuff. It's all competition, father. A fellow has to be hard-hearted, if he is going to become a self-made man nowadays. So," he added with a nod from the doorway, "you stumped up after all, old man. . . . Good night, father, and don't sit and worry any more about money matters!"

At supper every one felt somewhat depressed.

The doctor, cutting away at his beefsteak, sat deeply buried in thought. He expected to be called out in the course of the night to a patient, and was, therefore, fortifying himself with an extra hot dish. Minka still seemed to be in an offended mood, and sat with her eyes on the table cloth, playing with her serviette ; this evening it was her youngest sister Berthea's turn to hand round the tea-cups as her mother filled them. The twelve-year old Arnt was eating away, his mouth cram full, and looking along the table at his father, while Massy, cross and

petulant, was making some opposition against having her serviette tied round her neck.

Schulteiss, the children's tutor, who was of a sensitive disposition, felt acutely the strained state of things around him. He was hunch-backed, and as he let his head sink into his chest, the deformed shoulder rose higher and higher.

While thus coiled up in himself and his own thoughts, he could not resist stealing a glance at Mrs. Borvig. Her face was clouded and overcast, and she seemed on the point of tears all the time. . . . It struck him that she must have had curly hair when she was young, for to-night a glossy, obstinate curl had wriggled itself astray on her forehead. Perhaps it was there at other times also, but this evening. . . .

There was something strange about her every time she glanced at the doctor to see that he wanted nothing. . . . "No, it is the cheese your father wants, Minka.—Get your father a clean plate, Massy dear."

There's something in the air . . . there's something in the air, thought Schulteiss.

The doctor beckoned impatiently with his knife for the butter, and absent-mindedly helped himself twice to cheese.

For a moment the situation changed for the better, when the doctor sent to the kitchen to know if any message had come.

Perhaps it was one of his patients, who had put the doctor in such a bad humour? That was hardly possible; he had been down to Kalnæs yesterday about this very same case. . . .

Schulteiss began looking stealthily, but more and more anxiously at Minka. She appeared so strangely depressed and absorbed.

He became lost in all kinds of conjectures.

Could there have been anything by the post to-day which concerned her?

Schulteiss became still more wrapped up in thought. . . . Was there anything her father had proposed, which she did not like, or anything she wanted which her father objected to . . . the mother was so upset.

A love letter? . . . the thought went like lightning through his brain; he broke out in a perspiration, and rubbed his clammy hands on his serviette. He had long been trying to find out how she managed to send letters secretly up to town. . . .

He shot hasty anxious side glances at her—the room seemed to become darker, and to swim before his eyes, while at one moment Minka's face seemed far away, and then again close to him. . . .

It must be a proposal!

He began to tremble, quite overcome with excitement.

To such a young, innocent girl. . . . Of course the father was right in not thrusting her into the

arms of the first-comer, to whom in her great inexperience she might take a fancy.—Mrs. Borvig must be brought to see this. . . .

Should he speak? Should he, with tears, confide to the doctor—and his wife, how extraordinarily gifted she was, quite an exceptional character; that she was still the heavy dreaming bud, completely unconscious of her own splendid endowments? — — He would implore them not to let any premature reality break or crush them before they had been allowed to develop. . . .

He became lost in wild speculations, and could not remember how he got away from the table, or how, as was his custom, he found his way to the corner in the sitting-room, just behind the piano. Here he would bury himself, and with his head leaning against the wall, feast his eyes on Minka, who, in return, regarded him as her secret audience, whose admiration she was always sure to gain by her expressive and spirited performance.

The doctor, as usual, disappeared into his study.

He stood with the lamp in his hand, in front of the bookcase, searching for a volume, and did not turn round, when his wife and the servant entered bringing his coat and things for the journey.

“As I have said,” he remarked curtly, as soon as he had found his book and seated himself—“not a penny.—I shall write and tell him to-morrow.”

Mrs. Borvig remained standing awhile, as if she

needed time to collect herself after her late agitation.

“That is not my opinion, Borvig; I am his mother, and have also a right to a voice in the matter. I am not at all prepared, I tell you, to take that responsibility upon myself. I have seen him before me the whole of the day, walking about angry and bitter in his heart against us, and perhaps with some justice. . . . I tell you, I cannot bear it!”

“Tell the girl to take away my things tell her to take them away. . . . I don’t know why I should rush and tramp about, and slave, and go out at night in slush, and frost, and darkness, so that he can sing away the money. After this I shall only continue with my day practice.”

“Is it right to go on in this way, when we have such a serious matter before us? From your point of view it is hard for you, I understand that well enough. But I don’t suppose you want to cut off all bonds between us and the boy.”

“Yes, yes—as if he were proud flesh, Bente. . . . That is the only way. . . . It is a case of mortification having set in—silly hollow conceit—and it must be operated upon—he must be brought face to face with necessity!”

“You must think it over, Borvig,” said his wife, in a tone which made him feel uncomfortable. “I am his mother—and I am afraid you would be

operating upon me as well—you would be cutting away more than the boy.”

“You are going quite mad, Bente.”

“I will tell you at once, Borvig, that I have made up my mind. Endre is not going to be left to himself. . . . I will go straight to him, if necessary! I have money in the bank, as you know.”

“Now, now, now, Bente . . . be calm . . . just look at things for a moment . . . and”—he sprang up from his chair—“I believe, by Jove, you want to frighten me—to point a pistol at my breast. . . . No, no, Bente—come here and let us talk—you are quite overstrung, hot, flushed.” . . . He sprang up again, and struck the table. “My God! what a rascal of a boy. I believe he will end by taking his mother from me, — — — and this is the way they press money out of me,” he added bitterly. “Well, well, Bente, go his errands.”

“I go no one’s errands—I only do what has to be done, to preserve peace in the house. . . . The five thousand crowns my brother left me—I suppose I can dispose of them as I like—two thousand can go for his training.”

“Your five thousand in the savings bank?” The doctor sat silent for a moment, his face darkening with anger.—“By all means, by all means, you shall have them,” he said coldly. . . . “I am almost afraid I have made free to-day with your

money. I lent Kjel five hundred out of it but I can assure you, on my honour, I have full guarantee that the sum will be repaid in March—the money will then lie promptly here on the table at your disposal. . . . Only I want to have nothing more to do with your money—or with any remittances to our son—the singer.”

“Don’t show such pettiness, Borvig. Have I, at any time, even so much as mentioned that money? But only tell me, is there any other way out of it? Or do you mean to say it will be of any use to drive Endre back to what he has once given up? That, at all events, is sure to lead to nothing.”

“You let that boy run away with you, Bente,” he interrupted flippantly; “you are quite, quite blind to all his follies.” He leant back in his chair and looked at the ceiling.

A hot flush overspread Mrs. Borvig’s features. . . . “Have I at any time objected, with as much as a word, to your putting money into Kjel’s mill?” she asked, passionately.

“What—Kjel?—are you going to bring him into the question? . . . That’s another matter. Kjel understands his business; he is quite cut out for it—seems to be made for it. And I don’t suffer from any blindness in that quarter.”

“I am not so sure about that, Borvig. First, with much difficulty, we got him to go in for farm-

ing. But I never saw him as much as touch a spade with his own hand—not even a garden spade.”

“No, of course not; he wasn’t made for that.”

“Do you remember the grand calculations and plans he went about with when he wanted to take over Rognerud Farm without any capital?—He only thought of riches and luxury! . . . Now we have seen how that would have ended; I felt quite happy when he bought this saw-mill with our savings and got out of that business.”

“Ah—that was Kjel’s way of sowing *his* wild oats—all those calculations! . . . His one idea is to get on in the world.—No, he is the very opposite to Endre—he wants to make money, not to waste it. . . . And now I think the only thing to be done is to get Master Endre back to something like a sober state of mind.”

“The only thing we have to do, Borvig,” said his wife with a determined look, showing that her mind was made up, “is to help him. Besides, I do not think you quite understand what a real singer is. It is not a strolling minstrel that Endre wants to be.”

“No, by Heavens, with the best will in the world I cannot get rid of that thought. . . . But of course you have the money—dispose of it by all means for his edification.”

At this moment he heard the sound of sledge

bells outside, and as he rose to depart his wife went up to him to help him on with his fur coat.

"Well, Borvig, you may think as you like, but these two thousand crowns I must have—to do as I like with for Endre. I cannot bear the thought that he should slip away from us. I should have no peace of mind!" she cried, greatly distressed.

"I have told you you shall have them, Bente. . . ."

He waived her abruptly aside as she offered to help him on with his coat.

"You know well enough I have never thought of that money, Borvig—nor troubled myself about what you decided to do with it. . . . No, let me tie your scarf a little tighter . . . it is you who work for us all . . . and Endre has made things very difficult for you with his constant changes and disappointments. . . . I don't wonder you are getting tired of it after all, poor dear. . . . But"—here the little, slight figure raised itself on tiptoe to pull up the fur collar over his scarf—"but then you love the children no less than I. . . . And when we *must*, well then——"

"When *I* must, then — —?" he thundered.

She started back a little, and looked at him.

"Yes, I understand," he exclaimed in a bitter tone, walking hastily towards the door in his heavy top boots, "I must help him to what will end in his ruin . . . quite against my own conviction. . . . But, Bente," he added, sternly, turning round at the

door, while she took up the lamp to light his way, "that letter to-morrow, with the liberal encouragement to the singer, you must be good enough to indite yourself.—I am afraid I should take away his belief in himself in language not over polite," he finished, as he passed out of the front door into the darkness.

II

THE snowflakes fell closely and heavily against the schoolroom window panes at the doctor's at Elvsæt.

It was a grey morning, and it was scarcely possible to distinguish the wooded hills on the other side of the river.

The pupils sat round the long table, divided into three classes. Nearest to the wall could be seen the auburn shock of hair belonging to Minka,—a girl of seventeen or eighteen—who was deep in a German exercise, a German reader, dictionary, and a couple of other books being piled up like a fence between her and her sister Berthea, a thin, slight girl, who was busy gnawing the end of a slate pencil, and who represented the second class.

The lowest and more numerous third class consisted of the doctor's youngest children and some of the neighbours' sons.

“Now then,” said the little hunch-backed tutor, shouldering the ruler and placing himself in position, “now then, Arnt, what was the name of the king whom the Danish women ransomed with their jewels from his prison in Wendland?”

“ Sweyn—Sweyn Forkbeard.”

“ Pshaw! does not your natural instinct of beauty tell you that such a king was not likely to be called Fork-beard—For-k-beard! ”

Schulteiss drew himself up, gave a side glance at Minka and continued: “ It must have been a man who could fire the imagination of woman.”

He walked to and fro with half-closed eyes and the lofty air of a seer, which was an indication that he was about to enter upon one of those grandiloquent lectures, of which the third class understood nothing, but that to-day there would be some fun and they would escape all further hearing of their lessons.

“ Rather a man with handsome features, through which shone a master mind. Sharp, severe eyes, which could suddenly become fascinating,” he looked majestically around him, “ a fine intelligent head upon a pair of broad shoulders.”

Minka and Berthea exchanged glances.

“ Well then, they sacrificed their jewels. . . . Did they repent it? ”

“ There is nothing about that in the book, Mr. Schulteiss.”

“ I ask, if you think they repented it; I address myself to your undeveloped intellect. Do you think for instance, your sister Minka would have repented it, if she had given her beautiful brooch? ”

Minka bridled up as if she thought the comparison rather personal.

"It would depend what sort of a king he was," put in Berthea, much interested.

"Allow me to inform Berthea, that without that patriotic act of sacrifice a noble deed would have been lost to history—a glorious deed."

"Anyhow I shouldn't give up my brooch to Peter nobody-knows-who," she retorted.

"If he had had a hunch like a dromedary" whispered Ole the sheriff's son, with dilated eyes, ready to burst out laughing.

"In the meantime,—what's that noise over there? It was about the position of woman in former times here in the north, that I was speaking. This about the jewels showed one characteristic—that of enthusiastic devotion—then I mentioned Olaf Trygvason's queen, Thyra, who sat below deck and wept, when Olaf fell in the battle of Svolder, and who died of a broken heart."

"She might have helped to finish off a few of the enemy, instead of sitting down and howling," said Arnt.

"It reveals another trait in her; depth of emotion," continued Schulteiss, quietly disregarding the remark, "depth of emotion."

"I read lately about a dog, which died on its master's grave," Minka thought fit to remark from the depth of her studies.

"Quite right," he replied with a complaisant bend of the head, "we are now coming to the more inter-

esting emotions—Sigrid the haughty! The battle of Svolder was her political work, her revenge, which she had pondered over for days and nights, and which she most artfully and ingeniously carried into effect—all because King Olaf had deceived her. Here we have the individuality of woman at its best. The man who offends her pride and her love she kills—she kills!”

He shrieked the last words in such a high voice, that it almost cracked.

Berthea bent her head and giggled in her girlish way, giving her nose a twitch, a trick at which she was an adept, and stealing furtive glances at Minka.

Minka straightened herself with a jerk, her mind apparently quite differently engrossed, and set to work at her exercise with renewed zeal. This matter did not concern her.

With a peculiar, quiet smile of satisfaction and a somewhat defiant look, Schulteiss again resumed his lecture, addressing himself to the third class, which, however, seemed to be quite unimpressed with its contents.

“We find woman then, in her true character, when she appears in a different *rôle* to that of the housewife or the spinner at the wheel. She is filled with the great desires of life: love, the wish to rule and govern outside her own little domestic circle, the claim also to call man to account and demand her rights from him, to whom she can no longer blindly

and submissively give herself up; with whom she shall share interests, development and growth. Such women also demand that they should retain their own name, that it should not become lost by their marriage. . . . She, to whom I referred, will for ever be called Sigrid the haughty. I can almost describe her appearance. . . . Rich, auburn hair," he glanced at Minka's abundant tresses, "a strongly marked face with the family likeness—something like—hem—like Mrs. Bente — — and with dreamy eyes . . .," he muttered absently.

"I must ask you, Mr. Schulteiss, to leave mother out of these comparisons," interrupted Minka sharply. "Besides, outside the family, she is generally called Mrs. Borvig."

"Figure and stature as entirely different as a great and powerful one from a small and delicate. An unusually strongly built, firm neck, and splendid shoulders—but when young, Sigrid the haughty was in appearance a tall, erect, fair and capricious girl with wild eyes."

"I suppose you mean that nobody would have been able to get her to sit and write German exercises," snapped the incorrigible Berthea. She had long been noticing Schulteiss' weakness for getting her sister interested in the subject.

"This woman possessed the indomitable unconquerable nature, which the world has never been able to subdue. There was a maidenly haughtiness about

her person, which brought kings to compete for her favour, while she rejected them and drowned them in her vats of mead like flies. . . . Then came Olaf Trygvason, the handsomest and proudest man in Norway ; he had ascended the Smaltserhorn."

Schulteiss stretched his neck, gazing upwards as if he saw the well-known peak itself.

"Him she loved, and to him she would give herself. And when he thereupon rejected her, and in his fanaticism struck her in the face with his glove, and called her a heathen jade, because she would not change her faith, one desire—one alone—possessed her soul—to kill him. . . . And this came to pass at the battle of Svolder, where Queen Thyra sat below deck, with no thoughts of her distaff!"

"The King had to change his sword, for his own was quite jagged," Ole enlightened him.

"Yes, and then he jumped overboard ; he would not be defeated," protested Arnt.

"I think it is generally admitted," resumed Schulteiss with a glance at Minka, "that these two women were personalities of the highest rank, each perfect in her way. The one was the brave and faithful queen, the ideal of the domestic hearth—the other was the forerunner—the forerunner—" he suddenly raised his voice and beat the air with his ruler, as Minka, in a fit of abstraction, looked at him—"of the liberated womankind, who fight for their individuality in our time!"

He felt greatly tempted to turn round and address himself to Minka, but roused himself with an effort, and began, with a severe expression, to examine the children :

“ What do you know about Gyda, Arnt ? ”

“ She proposed—no, Harold the Fair-haired proposed to her. But she said that if he came again and proposed to her, before he had conquered the whole of Norway, then——”

“ H'm, h'm—you see—the ladies were not so over modest in those days either,” remarked Schulteiss slyly, with half-closed eyes. “ A personality,” here he looked fixedly at Minka, “ conquers the kingdom and from that standpoint one looks down with infinite contempt upon the insignificant persons far below—the myriads with their cringing bent backs. . . . ”

There was a titter among the boys.

“ Harold the Fair-haired had a regular swarm of wives and children,” cried Ole.

“ And still he was only twelve years old,” interrupted Arnt.

“ Solomon had more ; he had seventy-two,” broke in Tor, the son of the parish clerk.

“ I might here remark,” said Schulteiss sarcastically, “ that with the exception of the before mentioned Gyda, and his later queen, Ragna from Jutland, they were all women of no character whatever. . . . Whether there be one or a dozen

spinning-wheels it matters little in this case. In the course of time we have learnt how to restrict ourselves to only one—virtually from economic considerations. . . . It has even been poetically exalted with the beautiful name of ‘Freya’s spinning wheel.’ Certainly something for a young lady in our times to direct her longings and dreams to.”

His look during the last sentences was unmistakably directed at Minka, who sat absent-mindedly playing with her pen, her thoughts anywhere but on her exercise.

“Doesn’t he feel proud of himself and think he is a grand speaker!” whispered Berthea with a contortion of her flexible nose-tip. . . . “And see, now he is trying to make himself look dignified.”

“Be quiet, will you ; he’ll see you are making fun of him,” chided Minka.

Schulteiss strutted thoughtfully up and down the room, staring at his feet, the shape of which he particularly prided himself upon. He placed them precisely and elegantly before him step for step, and at each turn he made a deep bend of the knees, answering to the amount of mental work he was engaged upon.

He became more and more excited, the turnings more and more hurried, and the bends with the knees more and more pronounced.

Suddenly he stopped with a beaming self-confident smile.

“ ‘The history of the spinning-wheel’ that is the title of a work I intend to write—in several volumes. What has there not been spun out of the spinning-wheel? The men have gone through the thread-loop like dots of wool. That is to say, h’m,” he threw his head back and exclaimed with an air of superiority, “*all* this about woman in the romantic light, I’ll leave to all the petty scribblers in the world I, I—” he burst out passionately till his voice almost approached a squeak, “I will light a fireband,—show up the slave, who is being bought, and sold; who is chained to the spinning wheel. And then, Miss Minka,” he stopped and looked solemnly yet slyly at her, as if to a confederate, “then begins the struggle for liberty. But first—first the history of the injury which has been done to her; her deep fall. . . . A highly complicated and delicate subject, which only a genius with the most penetrating psychological mind will be able to unravel—to expose in all its details. Such a man must know the womanly heart to the core, to the core!”

At this moment Arnt snatched at Schulteiss’ handkerchief, which was sticking out of his coat-tail pocket.

“But when my pen is once let loose,” he shouted, waving and flourishing his right arm, so that his bare bony wrist could be seen far out of his sleeve, “I will make some revelations—ah! some revelations.”

Arnt just then succeeded in partly pulling out the handkerchief which hung down like a tail.

“I will lay bare all her weapons—the whole of the arsenal! Step by step will I follow up her wretched path and prove how this constant hidden struggle of self-defence and intrigue against man—the lord of creation—has turned her innermost holiest feelings into sharply-pointed, poisoned weapons, into the most wily allurements, and made her a master of all treacherous snares, and perfected her in deceit and duplicity—reduced her hate and her love to that of the narrow-minded, faithless, crafty bondswoman. Yes, I maintain, changed her nature entirely, to the very core of her heart” He shot a fiery glance at Minka.

“She plays and coquettes with man as egotistically, dispassionately and bloodthirstily as the cat with the mouse. . . . She—she—she-e,” he continued, with a bland smile, “she sits bewitchingly by the trap, flattering and enticing—and when the fool has jumped into it,” he accompanied this with a contemptuous kick, “he gives his life, a whole world of emotions—;” his large pale lips began to quiver. “She weeps—her tears are irresistible and heart-rending.”

He paced hastily up and down the room, while the handkerchief wagged to and fro behind him. “She has been turned into the great impostor of the world a low, satanic instinct, whose

passion it is to allure a dangerous, I say, a dangerous, venomous, creeping thing, sparkling with a thousand seductive colours. . . .”

His voice suddenly changed and became fiendish and sarcastic. “A creature, h’m, h’m—which—which ought to be studied psychologically, and watched over with the same distrust as a snake, which you think you have tamed.”

“Hee, hee, hee! hee, hee! hee, hee, hee!—the snake, look at the snake,” laughed the children.

Ole had been busily attempting to drag the handkerchief altogether out of the tutor’s pocket with the end of a switch.

Schulteiss assumed a straddling position and began rocking backwards and forwards, his head thrown back, and his half-closed eyes fixed on the ceiling.

The “snake” was now hanging straight down, and the children were all attentively watching if it would move again.

“I have just revealed a terrible picture to you,” he said, taking a deep breath and turning towards Minka.

Minka looked up at him from under her drooping eyelids with an innocent, preoccupied air.—“What?—I beg your pardon! I am busy with my exercise, Mr. Schulteiss.”

A pallor suddenly overspread his features; his whole dignity seemed to shrivel up and disappear—

there was only the fussy, nervous, little figure left ; he coughed and with a stutter began :

“ I had next I had next intended to represent woman at that stage, when a keen sense of her own dignity is awakened—her grand and noble struggle in our time and deep—deep— —”

“ Hee, hee, hee, ee!—the snake there lies the snake !” Here the boys burst out into a wild, uncontrollable fit of laughter.

Schulteiss looked round bewildered.

“ There—there, Mr. Schulteiss,” exclaimed Berthea pointing obligingly.

He hastily picked up the handkerchief, went towards his books and passed somewhat flurriedly on to another lesson.

“ H'm—and now for some geography. The Langfjeldene”

“ You shut him up at last,” whispered Berthea exultantly to her sister.

Schulteiss nervously turned over the leaves of his book.

Meanwhile the boys had attentively watched the hands of the clock in the corner.

“ It is ten minutes to twelve, Mr. Schulteiss,” remarked Arnt, artfully, “ and we haven't got our lessons set for next time yet.”

“ Ah, yes—in history you can take to the end of the chapter.”

“ To the end of the chapter? When we have not

yet been heard the first part. . . . Shall we have two lessons in the same hour?" . . . grumbled the boys, slyly trying to waste the few minutes that were left.

As the fingers of the clock approached the stroke of twelve, the sons of the parish clerk and the sheriff jumped up with their bundle of books under their arms. They were always so very particular about the time, on account of the strict orders they made out they had from home to be in time for dinner.

Massy, the doctor's youngest daughter, was at Minka's side the next moment, and Berthea rushed downstairs to be present when the boys tied on their snow-shoes outside the front door, and to watch them going down the hill behind the storehouse.

Schulteiss, with an air of indifference, began collecting some books he had left on the table.

"You must excuse me for not quite finishing the exercise to-day," said Minka, as she put her things together, "but I really became quite absent-minded; you spoke with such vehemence."

"Oh, I am no Argus, I assure you; I do not attempt to supervise a pupil who has outgrown control," he exclaimed, hotly, his voice trembling with emotion.

Minka stood as if she were thinking about something.

"Mr. Schulteiss," she began, cautiously, "do you know anything about Miss Feiring?"

“Miss Thekla Feiring? . . . Yes. . . . I acknowledge her, if nobody else will; but this is between ourselves—only between ourselves! . . . I have been told a thing or two about her. . . . She is one of the ladies who write in *The Twentieth Century*, . . . one of the birds who twitter, unknown, in the tree—quite anonymously.”

“She is coming here to-day, Mr. Schulteiss,” eagerly confided Minka; “she is on her way to Judge Preus’, where she is going to be governess. Oh! I am so excited!” she cried, and rushed out of the room.

Schulteiss stood for some time looking at the door after it had closed upon her.

It was nearly four o’clock before the sledge bells were heard outside, and Miss Feiring arrived. The heavy fall of snow and the bad roads had delayed her. During the ensuing bustle, while the doctor’s man was taking the horse out of the sledge, Schulteiss stood in the schoolroom, rubbing the frost from the window pane, and looking out; and Kjel, the doctor’s second son, rushed out, bareheaded, to receive Miss Feiring.

As she entered the hall she looked like a snow-covered road-post, deaf to all persuasions to enter the parlour until she was divested of all her travelling wraps, and had taken off the heavy hair socks which enveloped her feet.

She was a slightly built girl, dressed in a fashion-

able, tight-fitting, tailor-made jacket, trimmed round the sleeves and at the bottom with fur. One of the buttons at the back dangled loosely by a thread ; and from the rich, silk-lined muff, which was suspended from her neck, there came a strong odour of perfumery.

Together with the rumpled handkerchief could be seen something which resembled the yellow cover of a magazine.

Kjel felt her searchingly scanning his thick winter jacket, and the loose, country-made trousers, which were tucked into a pair of high top-boots.

How provoking, that he should be obliged to present himself thus to the fashionable town-lady !

Quite unconcernedly, he began beating his jacket and trousers with his hands, as if he were brushing off snow.

“ We wear regular country clothes in such weather, Miss Feiring, for wading through the snow-drifts.”

She was not listening to him ; her small black eyes were, with lively interest, following Minka, who, with great care, was carrying the travelling wraps into the dining-room, and spreading them across two chairs to warm them.

“ So you are Miss Minka ? I did not imagine you thus—a little paler,” she remarked, as, with a smile of greeting and a courteous bow, she entered the sitting-room.

She appeared to dispense with the usual formalities; she looked round silently, reserving her opinions for herself.

"Well, at any rate, you have plenty of room out here in the country," she said, in the midst of her reflections. "One gets directly the impression of having entered a better world when one finds people burning birchwood instead of coals."

"But where did you get your idea of Minka?" asked Mrs. Borvig.

Miss Feiring looked at the young girl, with a smile.

"I really seem to know her quite well. Your son—the philologist—the philologist that was to be—has told me so much about his sister. He understands her so thoroughly."

Minka busied herself over at the stove, getting redder and redder.

"So you know our son Endre—quite well apparently," said Mrs. Borvig, feeling her way.

"Oh, yes, and what a gifted man he is . . . how beautifully he sings. I have met him almost every day for the last six months, with Figer, the singer. When he is talking about singing—there is no getting away, Mrs. Borvig! Quite a revolution has taken place in that art also—the impression must be realistically, dramatically embodied in the personality."

Mrs. Borvig looked nervously and uneasily

towards the study door, where she every moment expected her husband would appear.

"A duet by him and Figer—the one tenor, the other bass—is a treat beyond all description, and they are continually practising new things."

"Now, Miss Feiring, I am afraid your dinner is getting cold," said Mrs. Borvig, inviting her to the table.

"Thanks, thanks Figer and he are inseparable—always to be seen together. . . ."

"But now you must really come and have something to eat, Miss Feiring."

"He is sure to become a great singer! There is something so noble and sincere about his disposition that cannot be mistaken. I can assure you there are many besides Figer who think the same. . . ."

While Miss Feiring was partaking of some of the dishes which had been kept for her from dinner, she went on discussing the same delicate subject with the greatest zeal, in spite of all attempts to divert the conversation.

"Well, what do you think of us out here in the country?" began Kjel, when his mother left the room for a moment.

"I really thought you would have asked me something about the fish-balls," she laughed.

"Meat-balls, I beg to say."

"Well, then, meat-balls; it is the study of food which is the most important subject in the country

. . . and thrushes *en gelée*——” Here she gave a sympathetic glance first at the dish, and then at the door through which Mrs. Borvig had disappeared. “When I think of all the toil and trouble!” she exclaimed, as with her fork she lifted a thrush on to her plate. “In town we send to the restaurants for a dish of this kind when we feel inclined for it. That is all the thought and trouble it gives us. . . . Ah!”—and she turned from Kjel to Minka—“I felt at once, when we came to the first railway tunnel, that now we were rushing into a cavern, where everything breathed of food and cooking.”

“A most agreeable feeling to have, Miss Feiring, when coming into the country,” suggested Kjel, in a patronising manner, as he leant back in his chair.

“And when, at the station, I was put straight into the sledge and buried in a wolf-skin, I felt swallowed up by it all. I dared not even touch the skin at first—I thought it must be a real wolf.”

“Quite piquant,” said Kjel, with a wink, pulling from his waistcoat pocket a finely coloured meerschäum cigar-holder.

“It makes such a doomed one stupid, you know . . . all that grey snowstorm right in my face from the mountains and the endless, dreary, white river along which I was driving. At last I became

so pleasantly sleepy, and imagined that I was snowed up and frozen to death—till I should wake in heaven amongst my town acquaintances.”

“Well, you mustn't get too exaggerated an idea about the innocence of country life, Miss Feiring,” remarked Kjel. “Now and then we also get up a little excitement. . . . I can tell you, that one of our transactions in deals, which often runs into thousands, acts quite like a tonic. I will not mention the amounts; they might make you dizzy, Miss Feiring. . . . And with regard to one's life and doings—that is to say, in private life—we are really not so much behind the times, I can tell you. — — And—as far as I'm concerned—unfortunately . . . well, one doesn't talk about that in one's own family.”

Minka stared at her brother. Her look betrayed that, in her opinion, he was making both a prig and a fool of himself.

“But, of course, you need not remain out here for ever,” said Minka to Miss Feiring, sympathetically.

“I assure you, I felt as if I was being suffocated, and if I had not had the proof of a capital little article for *The Twentieth Century* to read . . . It was like the last ray of sunshine from town, with which to warm my frozen hands!”

She directed her discourse to Minka as the only one who could possibly understand her.

“It had such an attractive title,” she remarked lightly, and glanced carelessly out of the window, as Mrs. Borvig came in.

“Can you guess it?”

Minka turned pale and looked hurriedly round to see who was in the room.

“‘Woman’s awakening.’ . . . The editors were quite agreed it ought to be published.”

Minka stared at her, trembling, and all in a perspiration.

“There was such a delicious spirit of revolt in it. And then, all those excellent quotations from history. . . . Many, many thanks, Mrs. Borvig. Just fancy! cakes and preserves as well. . . . I assure you, if I met the authoress I should take her by the hand and press it, just as I am now pressing yours, Miss Minka,”—here she stretched out her hand and pressed Minka’s,—“and would ask her to continue to write,—to keep on sending more.”

Something in the tone of the one, and the excited look of the other, roused the attention of Mrs. Borvig, who glanced searchingly and inquiringly at them both. Then, as if trying to suppress something painful, she exclaimed with a sigh:

“Ah! that’s not an easy task you have undertaken—to educate and bring up two young girls, Miss Feiring. . . . A great responsibility, difficult as the times have now become, both for parents and children.”

Miss Feiring looked up with a gentle smile and a little pout.

"When the parents are obliged to cling to the old state of things as long as possible, it is often because they feel that the new has not yet succeeded in getting a firm and settled hold amongst us," continued Mrs. Borvig.

Miss Feiring directed an inquiring glance at the little figure. Here undoubtedly was the true country housewife, with her solid whys and wherefores for her deeply rooted views of life. But she yielded involuntarily to the firm, penetrating eyes.

"I suppose it's not such an easy thing," she said, ingratiatingly.

"No, not at all easy. A mother has her great troubles nowadays, I can assure you, Miss Feiring."

The doctor, who had been detained by patients in his study, now hurriedly entered the room.

"How do you do, Miss Feiring? I hope they are looking after you. You are going to Judge Preus', I hear. . . . A queer crank he is, I can tell you."

"Indeed? An original? I am so glad."

"He has one great idea. If you can only thoroughly believe in that, and ask him all sorts of questions about it, then you have conquered the man."

"Really? A man of ideas?"

"That is to say, of *one* idea, and that with a

vengeance. He believes in cremation, he quite raves about it. We are going to have it introduced next year. He has assured me of this all the eighteen years I have lived here."

"Ah!"

"Otherwise he is a good sort of a fellow, as old-fashioned and conservative as can be; but he does not impose any restrictions. . . . He is always troubled with a cough when he returns from the town fogs, from all the pernicious opinions up there, he says, and spends a whole week in expectorating them all up."

"But I must really protest against the notion that the air which is filled with ideas should be less pure than one without any, Dr. Borvig."

"The odours are bad enough that ascend to us from all the stuff you are using under your furnaces—bad in every respect."

"There have, for instance, been interests awakened for a world which has no fuel to burn," she remarked severely—"a world which the people have now had their eyes opened to—the proletariat."

"You mean the world that wants to throw the whole of society on the fire," retorted the doctor, sweepingly.

"If we are going to stick to logic, doctor——" she resumed bravely.

"Female logic—of course, of course," he interrupted in a satirical tone, "that is well known, . . . but

don't enter into any arguments with the judge about mending the world. He is so terribly satisfied with the old one, you understand. . . . Of course, you know there are people so fond of their old boots that they would rather have them mended a hundred times than put on new ones. . . . He is just one of them."

Miss Feiring's small, round, restless eyes reminded one somewhat of those of a mouse, running backwards and forwards, searching for an outlet between the wires of a trap. She was apparently uncertain whether she should rest content with such a sportive issue to the discussion, and continued her meal, swallowing silently and slowly one bit after the other, with an expression of reserve.

"You make me feel quite sick at heart, doctor," she exclaimed to give vent to her feelings; "I feel, as if I were being transported to Munkholm,* or some other island far away from the world. Not a human being with whom to talk about . . . about . . . all that takes place in the world . . . I shall only be cramming down German, English, History and Geography—and as a proper governess not contradict the master of the house. . . . To speak the truth, doctor, is not this the position to which your humble servant here is relegated?"

"You know, Miss Feiring—it is no use for Ministers of State to offer themselves as government

* A prison fortress on an island near Trondhjem.

clerks. One can be unsaleable, because one is too fine a piece of goods. . . . It never does to let one's intellectual aspirations go beyond one's position."

"That is to say, the unjust laws of society are now transporting me to my Siberia," she burst out.

Minka had become quite excited and greatly interested in the conversation ; she felt a stinging sensation in her eyes.

Kjel sat in a state of revolt. . . .

There was his father walking about making himself witty at her expense! He did not understand that he was trampling on the most delicate and refined nerves. . . .

He sprang suddenly from his chair :

"Well, father, according to your arguments, I have no right to any intellectual aspirations, as long as I make nothing ; but if to-morrow I make a nice profit on my deals, then I have a right to them. It is so narrow-minded and old-fashioned ;—nowadays we have all intellectual aspirations, that's my opinion. . . .

"Yes, all these aspirants to intellectuality!" muttered the doctor. "You yourself told me something about having lately discharged a dissenter from your sawmill, because he wanted to convert his fellow workmen, instead of doing his work . . . I believe you treated him with something to the effect that his mind was too superior for your mill."

“ Ah!—a case like that—quite an exception—quite different circumstances,” said Kjel, dismissing the subject with a toss of his head, as much as to say, that his father was not well informed on the matter.

Really a remarkable girl, to say the least, thought Kjel to himself. . . . The mere way in which she bends her head and speaks to people—such a piquant smile of superiority. . . . Then again, that little way she has, from mere habit, of leaving her gloves in her lap while she eats. . . . It is really too bad that she should be doomed to slave at the judge’s . . . he would have liked to tell her something about the great risks he had been running—for instance, the time he drove across the river on the half-inch thick ice, in order to pass Ring the lawyer and be first at the auction at Kjestad, and perhaps a little about the risky business he was now engaged in, and how twice a day he went about in fear and trembling, waiting for the postman, so that they at home should not know anything about his affairs. He did not wish to disturb the peace of the household.

“ Well, Miss Feiring,” said the doctor, when they had finished their coffee, “ it is not from inhospitality that I want to turn you out into the snowstorm, but if you don’t want to be too late, we ought to see you into your wraps and packed in the sledge again.”

“And then—ding-dong—off we go to Siberia,” said Miss Feiring good-humouredly, as she tendered her thanks and began putting on her things. “I can at least say I have halted at a pleasant station on the way. The editor will take anything you write,” she whispered, as she bent over Minka, who was helping her on with her travelling socks; “we must try somehow to correspond with one another.”

As Miss Feiring, enveloped in her wraps, was lighted out, Kjel, in his fur coat and whip in hand, was waiting at the front door, through which the snow came sweeping in.

“It is dark, and the roads near the river are dangerous and slippery, so if you have no objection, I think I had better drive you to the judge’s—it is only a dozen miles off.”

“I call that most considerate and humane of you, Mr. Borvig. I am really so terribly frightened at the thought of it all,” was the answer from among the wraps.

“Ugh! Am I to be buried again in all this?” she asked as, in the darkness outside, she was packed up in the furs of the sledge.

The snow creaked under the runners of the sledge. . . . She heard Kjel’s reassuring whoa-a! as with a sure hand, and an occasional crack of his whip, he manœuvred the restive horse along the slippery road.

The jingling of bells was soon lost in the white mist behind the storehouse.

The dining-room was now in darkness with the exception of the gleam of light from the lamp in the sitting-room. Both the chairs on which Miss Feiring's wraps had been lying still stood by the side of the stove.

Minka glided noiselessly about the room like a shadow, so that no one should think of calling or disturbing her.

It seemed as if she could retain the event of the day as long as the chairs remained there untouched so long as Miss Feiring still present, assuring her that her article would be printed, and really appear in *The Twentieth Century* with its heading and all.

Under one of the chairs she caught a glimpse of a little white object.

A cigarette! a very fine one, no doubt. . . . just under the place where Miss Feiring's muff had been hanging. She put it hurriedly in her pocket. Now she really had something tangible, that she could cling to.

She roamed about uneasily, nursing her new born happiness without being able to give vent to it. She wondered now and then, as she was sitting with the others at the supper table, at her own anonymous greatness.

If they only knew. . . . If they only suspected, that she, who sat there, and was hardly able to swallow her bread and butter, was among those who struck a blow in the cause of progress.

She felt almost as if she were a kind of secret nitro-glycerine or dynamite among them. She held up her head in quite a proud, warlike mood, when they were discussing Miss Feiring, and could quite overlook whatever they might think fit to say about her out here in the country. . . .

How Mr. Schulteiss would mope, if he knew it. . . .

After supper she sat down and played a triumphal march and all sorts of fantastic bits.

Schulteiss took his place behind the piano.

She gazed and laughed at him with flashing eyes, as he leant back against the music stand, arranging the pose of his head so that the shadow of his profile on the wall assumed a likeness to that of Napoleon.

Minka's mobile, changing countenance seemed to be full of unutterable communications.

She lifted her head with dignity and became quite imposing. . . . while Schulteiss, pale with emotion, was carried away with ecstasy.

When he, as in a delirium, bowed good night, she looked at him with a mysterious expression, as if she had much to say. . . . His hand trembled on the balustrade, as he mounted the stairs to his room.

Later on in the night, after having assured herself

that her sister slept, Minka put on a skirt, threw a shawl around her, and left her bedroom.

And up in the attic she sat in the darkness, thinking and smoking, and enjoying herself quite in a bohemian style as she thought, until she felt she could stay there no longer.

It was long before Mrs. Borvig fell asleep. She awoke suddenly in great uneasiness and anxiety.

As a doctor's wife she had become accustomed to being disturbed at nights. It was seldom that she did not get up through some fit, of anxiety or other, when she would make a tour of inspection across the big, cold drawing-room and upstairs to the children's bedrooms. It might be to see if the little girls had put out their light, or if Massy had kicked off the clothes and lay coughing, or it might be to see if the turpentine poultice round Arnt's neck had got displaced ; if the shoes and stockings were wet, and had been left on the floor instead of taken down to be dried ; or if any of the stoves were smoking.

On such occasions she would lie thinking out her mode of procedure, how she could manage to get up, light the candle and leave the room, without wakening her husband ; who had returned home late, or might be called out any time during the night to some patient.

She knew by experience what she might venture,

according to the position in which he lay, or whether he slept lightly or heavily.

She had studied his face as he lay by her side, till she almost guessed his dreams—always such a beautiful, placid expression, compared with the stormy one she had to encounter when he was awake.

She would walk about in the large, yellow drawing-room, when it was not too cold, and many a time she had felt almost happy there—enjoying a rest, and alone with her own thoughts. . . . But to-night she started up as if from a bad dream.

Something had happened. . . .

What did all this between Minka and Miss Feiring mean?

Some secret understanding between them—something that had to be concealed and kept from her. . . .

The article, which Miss Feiring had spoken so much about. . . . It must be something Minka had written.

Her face—her ill-concealed joy. . . . With a feeling of increasing bitterness she saw plainly that this was kept from her—the mother. . . .

And what could she have written?—"Woman's Awakening," was the title. . . . Minka had always been clever with her pen.

Ah! but it wasn't because Minka had written anything—it wasn't that.

Mrs. Borvig could only think of one thing—her thoughts continually reverted to it.

The confidence between them was gone—no longer existed. . . . Minka had developed unknown to her. . . .

She weighed it over and over in her mind the cleft seemed to grow wider and wider—she felt as if struck by a cold gust of wind.

She had lost Minka!

The eldest daughter who had been brought up by her own hand, and under her very eyes till she was grown up—in whom she believed so fully and thoroughly. . . .

But the very best of her life she had lived shut up in herself. She no longer knew the way to her innermost self. . . .

She had lost Minka!

She felt an uncontrollable desire to hasten to her side. . . .

Only to look at her, while she slept . . . as if to take a last leave of her illusion. . . .

A little while after, she stood with the candle in her hand in the yellow drawing-room, by the old-fashioned table, where all the clean linen had been placed.

The room lay in obscurity, the huge stove looming threateningly in the background.

The oppressive feeling from which she was suffering increased more and more.

To begin with, there was Endre, whom she supported with all her might on his new career.

Then there was Kjel. . . .

Did she know them—what their opinions were, and what they thought? Was she in their confidence?

Or had she, if not in exactly the same way, lost them also long ago—both her eldest sons?

She recalled how they, each in their own way, were in the habit of remaining silent and smiling, when she spoke warmly about anything.

How bitter Endre was against his father. . . .

And then there was Arnt, and there was Massy, still to lose.

In her perplexity and fear she only felt she must save whatever she could.

A cry of despair died on her lips—she would not lose any more—not any more! . . .

She walked restlessly to and fro, as if she were looking for something.

Had they given the children too little liberty . . . had they not confided sufficiently in them?

She herself was so attracted by the ideas of the day—had hoped so much for a better state of things. But when it came to the point, they were not so easy to carry out after all . . . had not yet taken shape and form.

She stopped in front of the cabinet, where the doctor kept all his drugs, and absent-mindedly held the light up to the numerous parcels, jars, bottles and boxes, big and small, as if to study the inscriptions.

Presently a bright gleam came into her eyes.

To-morrow we will order *The Twentieth Century!*

And then, quite casually, we will mention to Minka that she ought to try and write something—try what she can do with her pen.

She walked slowly across the floor towards the card-table, nodding approvingly at her own thoughts. The different pieces of furniture were like oases where she could rest and put down her candle.

A feeling of tranquillity stole over her.

How exaggerated everything became at night.

Of course, she had had nothing to eat at supper, owing to all the disturbance caused by Miss Feiring. One never sleeps well on an empty stomach.

What if she went down to the larder and cut herself a piece of bread and butter?

The light disappeared along the landing.

III

THE doctor had gone off in his kariol early in the cool, summer morning.

The housemaid had begun to clean the windows in the study, and to perform other domestic work, which was always undertaken during the doctor's frequent absences.

The appearance of Schulteiss in the rooms downstairs between meals depended a good deal on the goings and comings of that kariol. His nerves always became depressed by the doctor's presence—by the mere knowledge that he was there. . . .

He would make a tour of inspection through the rooms ; or walk and strut about outside the house, inhaling the fresh air, with his thumbs stuck in the armholes of his waistcoat—or stand gazing at the grinding-stone while it was being turned, and one of the haymakers was sharpening his scythe ; or, with an air of understanding, peer in through the door of the wood-shed, where the farm lad was chopping wood ; give short ironical views of life over the fence for the benefit of the sow and her pigs ; or philosophise with the old goat.

Down the garden they were busy weeding and watering in the cool shade of the early morning.

Schulteiss, in the midst of his ruminations, had just begun to balance himself, and with precise steps to walk along one of the logs outside the cow-house, when Minka saw him and came hurriedly through the garden gate.

He made a rush, as if he intended to reach the end of the log, but jumped suddenly down, with a deep, elegant bend of the knees.

"Mr. Schulteiss," she exclaimed, anxiously, "you are not so absent-minded, I hope, as to forget to watch for the postman before Kjel arrives. You know he always meets him, and looks through the bag down by the gate."

Schulteiss' quiet, confident smile dispelled all doubt on this point.

"It must be nearly ten o'clock, and you are still here."

"I assure you, Miss Minka, . . . Can you for a moment doubt, . . ." exclaimed Schulteiss, flurriedly.

"Couldn't you, for instance, just as well be taking your walk down on the main road, Mr. Schulteiss?"

"And thereby risk being observed by Mr. Kjel?" he exclaimed, triumphantly. "His suspicions would be awakened—and your interests compromised. . . . In a little while," he said, pulling out his watch and showing it to her, "you will see a person carelessly

lounging along the road, and disappearing down the path behind the summer house."

"What—not half-past eight yet? Is your watch right, are you sure?" she interrupted eagerly.

"I guarantee it! depend upon me, Miss Minka!" he replied, in a deep, sepulchral tone:

"Humph! You do so tease one, Mr. Schulteiss," she said, coquettishly scolding him; "why couldn't you have told me the right time at once?"

"I always refrain from contradiction—I am silent" he said with a bow, while his face beamed.

"Do you hear, Mr. Schulteiss? the thing is to get *The Twentieth Century* from among father's papers. The article, which I called "The soft little word Yes," I do not want mother to see. . . . She will recognise my style at once. . . . And you know when she wants to speak with me about it, and when all that one writes has to be taken to the window, and aired, and looked into oh, it is intolerable ! If they have accepted it I think it is sure to appear in this number. . . . It makes my blood run cold when I think how many a young girl—perhaps the very same night on which she, in a foolish moment, has given her 'yes'—is lying in tears, and regretting that she has given herself wholly away to the autocrat. . . . I could not rest until I had put down my ideas in writing—that a woman's promise should only hold good when divorce is obtained under fairer conditions, and when

she has the exclusive right to her own property, and full equality with the man otherwise."

"Ahem!—the idea is in itself excellent—even brilliant—if it—hem—had any prospect of becoming — — —That would at once become woman's full protection, coupled by law to her promise—become, so to speak, the diamond of liberty in her bridal crown— —ahem—but—"

"Yes, isn't that so," exclaimed Minka triumphantly, striking him across the fingers with a straw she was playing with. "I have—what was it he called it, he who discovered . . . :"

"Eureka—that was Archimedes."

"Eureka, Eureka! The solution of the whole question. I am beside myself with joy."

"H'in," said Schulteiss, with an air of doubt.

"Why do you look like that?" said Minka.

"H'm, h'm! I only meant—I only wish it could be carried out, Miss Minka."

"Haven't you so many times yourself said— —"

"But, unfortunately—you forget, in your unsophisticated heart, the autocrat, the oppressor. . . . He will not so easily sanction such a law."

"You only stand there contradicting yourself."

"I beg to be allowed to explain my standpoint. I maintain the idea is brilliant persistently maintain it. But the obstacles— —"

"What obstacles. . . . You have always obstacles when it comes to the point, Mr. Schul-

teiss. You are altogether such a man for obstacles."

"To get that law passed—presupposes I will not hide it from you—nothing less than that the woman question must first have conquered all along the line."

"Ugh! what an inconsistent contradictory person you are!" she burst out.

Schulteiss looked supplicatingly at her, having nothing to say in defence.

Minka stamped her foot impatiently.

"You are so tiresome, you always find something to throw in one's way Now that you tell me there is no chance of getting such a law passed, my article will fall to the ground," she cried in despair. . . . "I shall soon begin to hate everything that goes by the name of man. . . ."

"Well, Miss Minka, with an enthusiasm like yours, something might be done. . . . Hate must push the work of liberation forward, till at last everything will go of itself—from love."

"In any case, Mr. Schulteiss," she said, after a little hesitation, "should the article appear—and you really think it is well done—although I care no longer for the idea, if it cannot be realised for a hundred years—but if you think it will create attention, you must clap your hands three times at the garden gate, as if to the pigeons. And then Mr. Schulteiss there will very probably be an

answer to-day from Miss Lund, if they have been able to arrange that long walking tour. In that case Miss Feiring will be coming here directly to ask leave for me to join them. But father and mother must not know that I have had anything to do with it. . . . You understand, Mr. Schulteiss. You'll have plenty to see to, to-day."

He nodded, and went his way with the happy smile of the confidant, while Minka hastened down the garden again.

The excitement on the arrival of the post was over ; and the letters and papers, after having undergone the usual overhauling down on the main road, had been placed on the study table. Among the papers could be seen peering out of its wrapper the yellow cover of the new number of *The Twentieth Century* which, in the meantime, had not occasioned any signalling at the garden gate.

Schulteiss had strolled restlessly about till he had succeeded in informing Minka of the comforting possibility that perhaps there had not been space in this number for the article.

He was on his way to his room, when he was stopped by Mrs. Borvig, who came out from the sitting-room.

"We have had a letter from Endre. . . . Won't you come in and sit down, Mr. Schulteiss? . . . the letter is from Dresden."

"From the city of art, the beautiful Florence on the Elbe," added Schulteiss complacently.

"It is art, of course, Mr. Schulteiss—isn't it? I mean singing in operettas," she asked inquiringly.

"Undoubtedly, Mrs. Borvig—beyond all doubt."

"He says that the operas of the so-called first rank make the artist a brawler—a brother to the street-crier, in fact, through having to sing in the enormous buildings, and that a singer under such circumstances can only reproduce his coarsest tones."

"Quite a striking comparison," said Schulteiss.

"I understand, of course, so little about it. . . . There is a good deal in his letter which I think you could explain to me. He writes that he will not study under the celebrated Lutzmann."

"Ah, indeed! But that was the reason he——"

"He has found another teacher, who is no celebrity at present, but who is the leader, I understand, of a new movement down there—quite a new and more natural method. The old teachers have been spoiling and destroying the voice, they say. And there may be some truth in that, Mr. Schulteiss! Endre's voice is so soft, you know—so soft!" she said, gently, as if the recollection of it overwhelmed her.

"Yes; the present age wants what is natural—in fact, realism. That is the ideal around which all rally," demonstrated Schulteiss.

"But the life down there in Dresden is not at all

that I imagined. . . . All these friends—this intercourse with singers and actresses—for we must remember it is the operetta he is going in for. And besides, it is Fräulein this and Frau that, of such and such an operetta company. . . .”

“The artistic mind needs, above all, to live in an atmosphere of art, Mrs. Borvig. The fish must not be taken out of its element.”

“Is that your opinion, Mr. Schulteiss?”

Mrs. Borvig sat rocking herself to and fro, buried in her own thoughts.

“You know, of course, a mother is always over-anxious. I thought he would have led quite a quiet life there, only occupied with his studies—that he would have purposely hidden himself away from his past for the next two or three years till he could have appeared as a finished and perfect artist. . . . But this must take up a good deal of his time?”

Schulteiss bowed deferentially as he proceeded to remonstrate with her.

“Pardon me, Mrs. Borvig. If you judge an artist from a commonplace standpoint. . . . But then”—here he raised his voice—“an artist’s feelings are not commonplace; they are of a somewhat indomitable nature, and cannot easily be suppressed any more than the wild bird will submit to sit with clipped wings in a cage. If there is none of this indomitable nature in him,” he exclaimed excitedly, “then he is no artist.”

Mrs. Borvig seemed to be collecting her thoughts :

“No doubt you are right, Mr. Schulteiss, quite right. One must not go by ordinary rules, when it is a question of uncommon things.”

Mrs. Borvig sat long at her work-table after Schulteiss had gone upstairs, her face bearing a pained, thoughtful expression. She sighed deeply, lifted the table-lid, took out the letter once or twice, and put it mechanically back again. . . .

Then she began to pace restlessly up and down, her hand pressed to her side, as if in physical pain.

Towards evening the doctor's house suddenly presented a lively appearance. On the steps and in the hall lay knapsacks, plaids, and sticks, while gentlemen and ladies in tweed costumes, woollen stockings, and thick-soled boots, moved noisily and merrily about the rooms.

A party of pedestrians, three ladies and two gentlemen, had arranged to meet Miss Feiring at the doctor's, where she had already arrived earlier in the day, and was now busily engaged in persuading the doctor and his wife to allow Minka to go with them. They had planned a three or four days' walking tour into the neighbouring mountainous district. Kjøl was, of course, to be one of the party—Miss Feiring had undertaken to arrange that. They would have to depend upon his reliable

fishing-rod for the red mountain trout, which they would grill over the fire when they encamped.

They were to start before sunrise the next morning, so that they might rest when the heat became too oppressive in the middle of the day.

Doors and windows were open, and the rooms were filled with the scent of the new-mown hay, while the party was resting after the day's exertions, and smoking pipes and cigarettes.

Kjel's effusive hospitality turned the house upside down. The supplies which the party had brought with them were overhauled and supplemented with any tasty relish that could be found in Mrs. Borvig's larder, such as smoked salmon, smoked mutton, ham, and sundry other things.

But his father's cognac, he could not very well recommend that; he winked at the two gentlemen and smiled. The aquavitæ, on the other hand!

A boat was to be ready for them at the lake, where they were going to fish; they must have a horse, in case any one became too fatigued and to carry the heaviest of the baggage. He would see to it all; he had people and horses at his disposal all over the district.

As they looked at Kjel's face, with the short, bushy moustache, and listened to his confident, high and mighty assertions, they felt that in him they were indeed fortunate in finding an all-powerful

protector in that part of the country—a combination of plutocratic influence and local popularity.

Arnt and Massy were running about among the guests, greatly interested in everything, and soon became acquainted with them all.

The doctor showed himself from time to time in their midst as the hospitable host, saying a few words here and there. With an imperturbable expression he watched the cigarette smoke, which drifted in a dense cloud over the group of ladies.

The slight form of Berthea could be seen flitting to and fro, her bright eyes peering inquisitively forth from the little round face with its stumpy nose. She avoided more and more the eyes of the dark, handsome Mr. Krefting, a young M. A., when he looked towards her, till at last he approached her and began teasing and questioning her—making himself exceedingly interesting and telling her, she was a bud which would soon become a rose. . . .

Minka was seen but seldom; she glided in and out, with an uneasy, nervous smile.

She was apparently very busy; if she were going with them, she must of course get her dress and knapsack ready, shorten her skirt, etc.

As she rushed through the hall, her father beckoned to her from the study door:

“Minka! just one moment! . . . You would like to go with them, I understand,” he said, when she had closed the door.

“Very much, father, I have never been on such a tour.”

“I must tell you, my dear Minka—well, how shall I say it without distressing you too much? But as a doctor, you see, and as your father, I am somewhat anxious whether you are strong enough for this long, trying tramp through forests and fields. . . . No, no, my child, I don’t mean to forbid it—only to leave it to your own judgment. — — Suppose you suddenly became exhausted and ill, far away in the forest.”

“Oh, I am quite sure that will not happen, father. If I became ill,” here she burst into tears—“it would be because I was not allowed to go.”

“But you may go,” he exclaimed. “Listen, Minka; remember I shan’t be vexed with you on that account. I do not wish to compel you . . . but if you give up this tour, I will give you a gold watch on your eighteenth birthday in September next, with a fine, handsome chain,” he added, as he saw signs of refusal in Minka’s face.

She turned pale, as she looked at him.

“No, no, father,” she exclaimed, quite excitedly; “If you forbid it, I will stay at home, but I will not give it up for gold.”

“No, no—you mustn’t look upon it in that way. You know I forbid you nothing. But you understand well enough that I had to tell you this about your health. . . . But there, there—that was all

I wanted to say, Minka. If your mother says yes, you know I shan't say no — — There, don't be distressed, my child. . . . But you must be a little on your guard against those two dandies—the Christiania lions. You are a sensible girl, of course, but we don't know what sort of manners they have ; — — that was all I wanted to tell you. I only thought a gold watch would have given you greater pleasure."

"And you allow her to go?" said the doctor excitedly, to his wife, when he got up into the bedroom, where she sat stitching away at Minka's walking dress.

"Well, I don't think we can do otherwise."

"H'm—there you are—I understand nothing—absolutely nothing about these things. Formerly, if a young girl ran about the woods with strange men in this way, she would be talked about—lose her reputation, I can tell you."

Mrs. Borvig tossed her head. "I know it would have done me good, if they had given me more liberty when I was young. . . ."

"What! you, Bente?"

"I was no doubt like other girls. We went about like a flock of sheep. Good and bad—we all became silly creatures, filled with all sorts of ideas of life. When we got on in years, we had to learn all over again."

"To go off like this in all sorts of company—is

that the right thing for a respectable girl? Do you think that any man of position would care for such a harum-scarum?"

"People think otherwise nowadays, Borvig—I think many a man would. Just look at Kjel and Thekla Feiring."

"Don't talk about Kjel," he exclaimed, excitedly. "I tell you, Bente . . . in short, I ask you: Are we bound—compelled to let Minka go?"

Mrs. Borvig sighed deeply as she hurried on with her sewing.

"I know of no better way out of it, Borvig, than to let the children have their own way, and learn to use their liberty—for one thing is certain—if we refuse it them we shall lose them altogether. . . ."

Minka now came in to try on her dress.

"Was father worried about the tour, mother?—Was that what he was here talking about?" asked Minka, when they were alone.

"You see, this is the first time you go away from us," said her mother, avoiding the question. "These experienced townspeople understand so well the difference between chaff and flattery, and what is really meant. You know you mustn't take all they tell you for gospel."

"I'm not such an innocent from the country, mother. . . . None of them can come up to Thekla Feiring. Besides, I think I may say I am quite as advanced as far as ideas go."

“H’m!” murmured Mrs. Borvig, with a thread between her lips, “it is not exactly the interesting questions and discussions I am thinking about, Minka . . . there, you can take your own stand. It is more, what shall I say . . . the way in which they associate with one. One glides so easily into confidences and friendships and such like,—and then a straightforward girl like you can easily take for good what these——”

“Well, I must really laugh at you, inother. You seem to be afraid of flirtations and love-making and that sort of thing. . . . Pooh!—we have quite other interests now . . . there will be plenty of time yet to get married and be troubled with a lord and master.”

“Well, you see, one likes to see people in the light of the ideals they champion, but it mustn’t be taken for granted that they always answer to one’s expectations, Minka. . . .”

Minka shook her head with a superior air.

“Don’t imagine, my dear mother, we trouble our heads about those things. That was the case perhaps in former days . . . but, mother dear . . . won’t you ask father to lend me his field-glasses?—to carry strapped round my shoulders, you know. . . . It looks so sportsmanlike. . . . You need not be afraid of any infatuations, mother—oh, I am so happy, I cannot tell you how happy I am. I know I shall not get a wink of sleep to-night. . . .”

It is tiresome that I have to show myself downstairs in this poor, summer dress while the others have such fine tourist costumes. Louisa Lund is nowhere with her cheviot and brass belt—Thekla is the smarter, she has more style—it's quite inborn in her, as Kjel said the moment he saw her. . . . It was a splendid idea of his to have all the *melke-ringe** brought out to them on the steps—it gave, at once, a picnic-air to it all. And I noticed Kjel winking at Thekla; they were so amused, they could see Louisa was not accustomed to smoke cigarettes. Oh, no, mother, don't make it tighter at the waist, make it still looser—stylish like Anna Rists', so that one can tell at once you do not wear stays. Ready, mother? Then I'll put it on at once. . . . You might have made it shorter," said Minka, as she turned about and looked at herself. "Thekla's is shorter; it allows one a fuller swing."

"She is shorter waisted and has much longer legs than you, Minka. It would not suit you; you would look too stumpy."

"Remember to ask for the field-glasses, mother."

"Go and get something to eat, Minka, you have had no supper."

"Oh, I couldn't think of it, mother," she exclaimed, as she hurried out of the room.

Schulteiss was, as usual, on the alert, and hovered

* A national dish, somewhat like the Devonshire junket, kept and served in round, shallow wooden vessels.

round the groups, keeping sufficiently distant to avoid being entrapped. Suddenly, in a fit of high spirits, he made his way through the rooms, where the party, now highly animated, were gathering round a bowl of summer-cup, which Kjel knew so well how to make of all sorts of mystic ingredients.

If they had been down at his place, there would have been some champagne in it as well, he hinted.

Schulteiss had seen Minka come down in her walking dress, and thus understood that she had gained the day. The consciousness of having been more intimately associated with the scheme, made him feel quite sympathetic with travelling as a diversion. He began to expatiate on Napoleon's talent for economising space in packing his knapsack. He waited till Minka came to the door to hand her the county map; he was with them in the spirit, and marked roads on the map, one in blue and one in red. In his fancy he was standing on the brinks of abysses—watching and guiding Minka's steps, . . . helping her along the logs across the streams—was her unseen providence, . . . saw himself watching over her, with the stars above him, while she slept.

He ran up to his room and came down again with the printed legend about Röslake, and the dragon there—to read to the party at a suitable opportunity, when they rested in the fishing hut.

On passing through the hall, his attention was arrested by a peal of laughter, coming from the

direction of the hall steps. Minka, beaming with smiles, stood talking unconstrainedly to one of the two strangers. It was Varberg, an engineer, who had received an appointment on the new railway, the construction of which was to be begun the next spring.

Schulteiss took in at a glance the hawk-like nose, the thin sparse hair about the forehead—the pale, marked features—the restless, alluring eyes—a cool, cunning tempter!

“It is no longer any secret, that one can overcome the most trying exertions by sheer psychic force,” he heard the engineer remarking. “It can be developed in any one who has mediumistic powers; I order you to go ten miles, and you go ten miles.”

“Yes, when one has first been forced into obedience,” Minka answered presumptuously; “you might try with Thekla—Miss Feiring—try if you are able to crush her will. I should say she’ll give you enough to do . . . otherwise we would all like to have that sort of machinery put into us when we are going on a long walking-tour.”

“You are incredulous, Miss Borvig; but if I’m not mistaken, you are an excellent medium yourself.”

“Indeed? . . . do you think so? How can you tell?” she asked in eager curiosity.

“Your hand, which lies there on the railing—Will you allow me to stroke it, only with the tip of my finger a few times? . . . Well?—Is it not a

pleasant, soothing sensation?—If I stroked it sufficiently long, you would go to sleep. . . . I am now convinced, you are an excellent medium.”

“ Pardon me, Miss Minka,” said Schulteiss, springing forward, “but that kind of experiments I should advise you to be on your guard against. . . . Your father, I’m sure, would warn you strongly against them. . . .” He bowed, and his teeth gleamed, as he smiled complacently.

“ We are here entering upon unknown regions ; there are results and consequences which cannot be reckoned with beforehand a giving away of one’s will.”

He spoke by fits and starts, his face growing paler, as he kept on bowing in an exaggerated way, while he clasped and rubbed his hands in nervous excitement.

The engineer stared at him in amused surprise, and exchanged looks with Minka, who had really never noticed before what a caricature Schulteiss was, till he made this exhibition of himself before the stranger.

“ The preceptor, I presume, who has guarded the footsteps of your youth ? ” he asked, with undisguised merriment.

Schulteiss stood for a moment confused, then quickly withdrew, and rushed at a furious speed up the stairs.

The door of his room slammed to.

He lay on his bed—gnashing his teeth in the stillness of the evening.

“Miss Minka,” he began imploringly, with distorted features and solemnly uplifted arm, “he wants to paralyse and capture your will; I warn you. . . . I beseech you—avoid him and all his works—his look as well as his touch. . . . I will move heaven and earth—appeal to your father and mother. . . .”

He lifted himself in his bed and exclaimed threateningly :

“Oh—that dev—il !”

It was late before Mrs. Borvig got to bed after her troublesome and anxious day. She lay half asleep thinking about colds and wet feet and sleeping in sheds at night; and was wondering whether she should give Minka one more hint—or whether it was at all wise to say anything. Admonitions and warnings might so easily savour of home authority. Perhaps she could convey it so gently to her, that she might act upon it, as if it were her own incentive.

She must put a bottle of stomach-bitters in Minka’s knapsack, and an extra vest.

Then began the bustle and noise of calling everybody.

The breakfast, consisting of coffee, bread and butter and eggs, was on the table in good time;—they must not go out into the damp, cold, morning air, without having partaken of something warm. . . .

The party left at early daybreak, while the mist still lay like white fleecy wool over the river. Boots and petticoats soon became saturated with the heavy morning dew.

Apparently both people and animals had all got up too early; the morning dragged wearily on from four o'clock when the haymakers were sharpening their scythes and going to cut the grass while the dew was still upon it, till five o'clock, when the streak of sunlight which fell on the bell tower of the storehouse roof, began to glide down the wall, until it reached the starling's cage, and then it was only half-past five.

A deep stillness had settled over the place, which wore an aspect of painful desertion.

Massy and Arnt would not go to bed again after they had once been at the trouble of getting up.

Arnt's perspiring face and hay-covered jacket betrayed that he had been diligently assisting the whole morning in carting hay from the fields to the loft. Massy, who had a talent for discovering where the hens laid, had just been out searching for new-laid eggs.

The doctor came down to breakfast at the usual time, having had his full night's rest.

"Well," he exclaimed, as he cracked his new-laid egg; "Minka is off, then? . . . If I had seen my way to do it, Bente, I assure you, I should have stopped it—such a vagabond life."

“ You must remember, Borvig, that young people nowadays want quite a different kind of recreation than in our time ; their interests are more universal.”

“ Oh, indeed ! ha, ha ! Of course, they are no longer ordinary mortals, oh dear no. . . . Now they only write and talk and philosophise about love with each other. . . . We only knew of yes or no ! But these people, they understand how to get quite a different enjoyment out of the matter—these ladies and gentlemen—these kindred spirits—in the woods ! . . . ”

“ A healthy and cheerful out-door life may lead to something better than the old sneaking about in corridors and corners,” said Mrs. Borvig.

“ Oh bosh, Bente ! Sweethearts always will conceal themselves.”

IV

THE willow-trees in front of the doctor's house were shedding their last leaves, while their tops bent moaning over the ridge of the roof.

For weeks the weather had been grey and unsettled—storms, driving rain, and clouded skies, with intervals of quiet autumn days, shrouded with fog and misty rain.

The doctor came and went in his kariol, well provided against the weather, with his top-coat and oilskin, cape, and his kariol-apron tightly buttoned around him. The front door was kept shut, and the scraper and pine branches on the steps were used by all sorts of feet, which came through the autumn mire from all quarters to see the doctor.

The only change visible in the house this Sunday was that the double windows had been put in for the winter. The rooms were somewhat darker, while the heat from the stove made them more pleasant and cosy. Now and then a long wavy streak of moisture, produced by the damp fog outside, found its way down the window panes, while

from the gutter above large drops fell with an inaudible splash to the ground.

Mrs. Borvig and Massy had driven to church, and had afterwards paid a hurried visit to the parsonage. On their way back they crossed the river by the ferry, near the saw-mill, to look in upon Kjel.

Berthea had taken advantage of their absence and the quietness that reigned to get a letter written up in her bedroom.

The bailiff's son, Ole, who was two years her junior, had made her the object of his wild, boyish passion. She had undoubtedly encouraged him, and in school a finger-and-sign language had been indulged in between them.

But yesterday he had slipped into her hand a letter, which informed her that his father had decided to send him to town to be apprenticed to his uncle, the gunmaker. He knew he should not be able to endure it, and proposed they should run away together to America. In Dakota gold could be found by merely digging for it, and one could easily subsist by hunting. There were foxes and otters, buffaloes and bisons, and plenty of wild horses to hunt them with. He finished by saying that he only meant to carry out this plan when he had been confirmed, in the autumn of the following year.

As Berthea wrote she let her tears fall, so that both ink and paper could tell of her despair.

Arnt spent the long forenoon down by the woodshed, making shafts for his little sledge, a task he had long been intent upon finishing for the winter.

The old farm goat now and then put in an appearance, looking inquisitively through the open door, and watching him attentively.

He was interrupted by a peasant, who had brought a brace of capercaillies for the doctor on his way to church, a usual method of paying *in natura* for medical treatment. It was the first game of the season of that kind. Doctor Borvig would never hear of accepting any game shot in close time.

Arnt stood for some time in the kitchen entrance amusing himself by stroking back the upright feathers on the bird's neck.

"Look here, Minka," he said, spreading out one of the bird's wings, "here is the hole where the shot has gone through—just in there. . . . It can't be so long since it was alive. . . . It is still warm—just feel it. . . . Well, I declare, she daren't touch it! Daren't you really?"

The two capercaillies hung on a nail in the portico, with red edged, half-closed eyes; a small twig of pine was stuck in their beaks, and the blood dripped now and then from them, forming a small pool on the floor.

Minka stood staring at it.

"Daren't you even open its beak?—Just look here," continued Arnt.

"Don't touch its head," exclaimed Minka, pale with terror; "don't you see, it is fixing its dead eyes upon us? Don't touch it, don't touch it, I tell you. . . . You shall not touch it" she exclaimed, shuddering, as she ran indoors.

Just before dinner a number of people, returning from church, stopped outside the doctor's. A wounded man was being carried towards the door. It was the same peasant who had brought the capercaillies in the morning. He had been found lying apparently lifeless near a milestone, with a gaping wound in his head. His horse had bolted down one of the hills; the trap had been overturned and dragged along.

The man lay on a stretcher with his pale, death-like face turned upwards, a dark red streak extending towards the wet clotted hair. The dim, filmy eyes, bloodshot from extravasated blood, stared unpleasantly from beneath the half-closed lids.

Minka and Arnt came running out, and forced their way to the front.

Suddenly Minka uttered a wild shriek.

The doctor came out on the steps, shouted angrily to his children to go in, and ordered the man to be carried into his study, and placed on the sofa.

Schulteiss, as usual, stood looking out of the passage window upstairs, when Minka came running up, as if distracted. She made her way hastily

towards the drawing-room, but on seeing Schulteiss, she raised her arm, as if trying to shut out some object from her sight, and exclaimed :

“ Oh, those eyes I shall never get rid of them ! ”

“ But how could you be so careless, Miss Minka, as to expose your delicate nerves to such a shocking sight ! ”

“ Exactly the same red eyes as the capercaillies' They stared at me with such a deathlike glare, just as if they knew of something far within me, of which I was so terribly afraid—a kind of soul or spirit, which looked at me through those eyes, and threatened me.”

She opened the drawing-room door, and looked in, but closed it again hastily.

“ I don't think I dare be alone. . . . I will stay here till dinner time. . . . ”

She sat down in a corner with her face buried in her hands.

“ I think it is possible, Miss Minka, to distinguish between nervous impressions and real spirit manifestations,” began Schulteiss, cautiously.—“ No, no—I speak with reserve ; I do not at all deny the possibility. . . . But bloodshot eyes, such as those, are in themselves sufficient to ”

“ I tell you it was *not* the eyes—there was some one beyond them, who had something to say to me . . . Oh, I cannot bear it ! . . . They want me.

for something they seem to be forcing and dragging me," she mumbled.

Suddenly she sprang to her feet.

"Now I am thoroughly convinced, Mr. Schulteiss, about all that Mr. Varberg told me on the tour last summer. . . . Now, for the first time, I see it all. Every word is true—now I have had a proof. . . ."

She stood pondering.

"What can it be that the spirit wanted to tell me—what could it be? Do you think it wanted to warn me—against anything in the future—any serious misfortune?"

"If it should really be a communication, which I, however, greatly doubt"

"I must beg you, once for all, to spare me from your superior discourses on this subject, Mr. Schulteiss—that which I know, I know. And if it is your intention to be always criticising and doubting it would be better, perhaps, not to speak with you about it."

She was apparently piqued, and turned to go.

"*I superior!*—*I discourse!* in face of your inner convictions—which are so sacred to me. . . . No, Miss Minka!" he said, striking his breast. "Here you may safely unburden your thoughts! And if you really think—really think that it was any kind of materialised spirit, any kind of embodiment through the peculiar expression of the eyes,

truly the most exquisite and refined spiritual language — —. If you believe it, then I believe it, just as I believe in you."

"But was it only a warning, do you think?" began Minka again.

"Scarcely anything else, presumably only a warning voice!"

"Do you mean do you really believe?—The blood actually froze in my veins from terror. — — But what can it be? There is such a restlessness in me, as if I am being dragged—expected. . . . Just fancy, Mr. Schulteiss," she laughed suddenly, "I felt this morning as if I must absolutely go up to town. The same feeling came upon me directly after I had seen the capercaillies. . . . Very strange quite mystic enough to make one shudder. . . . But why should I especially be selected?" she continued, looking absently before her. "Could it be any one who was longing for me thinking of me who wants me?"

"Oh, no, no, Miss Minka," interrupted Schulteiss suddenly, dismissing the idea entirely. "Everything seems to imply that it is a warning—only a warning voice—almost something hostile!"

"Well, that's not how I feel about it. . . . I should like to see still more," she exclaimed all of a sudden. "We must get to know something more, Mr. Schulteiss — — we must. . . . If you are of the same mind as myself, we will try spirit writing,

which Mr. Varberg told me about. But nobody must know anything about it. . . . Now, that's settled, Mr. Schulteiss, we'll try. . . . It's only a piece of round paper with some verses and some big letters around it. We then turn it round, and try to get answers. . . . Listen!—now they are calling us to dinner. . . . But after dinner, about coffee time, we'll begin — —”

While Minka and Schulteiss during the quiet afternoon were busy up in the schoolroom with questions and answers from the spirit world, the doctor sat downstairs in the sitting-room, with his newspapers and periodicals. There was always plenty of reading matter put on one side for the Sunday, from the busy week.

Now and then he put away the papers and went to the windows and looked out.

The grey weather was thickening, and the damp lay like a veil on the panes; while drops were constantly falling from the window ledges.

About this time he was expecting Kjel with his *fiancée*, Thekla Feiring; Kjel had set out for Judge Preus' early in the morning.

The doctor began looking more and more frequently at his watch.

Just then the gig drove up to the door.

“Here are your letters by the post, father,” said Kjel, as he entered the room.

The doctor hurriedly looked through his letters,

and then sharply up at his wife, who followed quickly into the room—warm and excited from the reading of a letter from Endre, which she had crushed into her pocket, but which she had scanned sufficiently to know that there was another unexpected demand for money.

There seemed to be a tacit understanding that the doctor should not be troubled with any of Endre's correspondence.

"A new fur jacket, mother," said Kjel, taking Thekla by the hand and presenting her; "ordered from town. It only arrived this morning, just in time to take it to her myself Elegant, eh? Rather expensive, however lined with soft, fine wolf-skin inside, with collar of skunk. Thekla likes it very much. If you could only see for yourself how well it fits you!" exclaimed Kjel, as he helped her off with it. "By the bye, in our house we must have a long pier glass, so that you can see yourself from head to foot We've been doing nothing else but talk about our house on the way It's going to be quite a modern, up-to-date one—and everything arranged for two independent persons."

"H'm!" drawled the doctor, "the easiest way to arrange that would be to live apart as you have done."

"Well, Thekla is not likely to put up with any old-fashioned arrangement—the house is going to be a tip-top one. Isn't that so, Thekla?"

But Thekla had vanished; she knew what was now going to be discussed.

“Yes, I really think of building;—after all said and done, it will be cheapest,” he said with a shrug of the shoulders, as he began pacing up and down, “the cheapest after all.”

“Bless my soul, Kjel but the money—the money!”

Kjel turned round sharply and said irritably, “It’s only a question of what costs the most, father, say for five years—either to build or not to build money—of course, one must have money! — — But it all depends on being able to distinguish between the money you see and that which you don’t see. To live like a poor man is, however, the most luxurious one can think of.”

The doctor did not appear to be satisfied with his son’s arguments; he shook his head from time to time in grave displeasure.

“You see, Kjel,” gently demurred his mother, “both your father and I thought it would be safer if you waited to build till you had a little capital laid by to go on with.”

“How idyllic, mother—quite idyllic! ‘Love in a cottage’ It is just that old-fashioned way of living which does not pay—to live down there in the old house by the mill—with the whirl of the saw in your ears—and a wife who longs for all the requirements of the age And then not to be

able to make a proper appearance socially, as I in my position, and as a married man, should have to do, if I am to make any sort of impression of solvency upon my fellow creatures, and not sink down into quite another sphere— —where they— God help me!—would soon stop my credit I have thought it all over.— — The most probable thing that I would have to be prepared for with that cottage of yours, mother, would be to file my declaration of bankruptcy.”

“But there is something called thrift, Kjel,” sharply rebuked his mother, “and two young people like— —”

“Then the other side, father,” exclaimed Kjel excitedly, “the credit side. One must look things straight in the face:—The wife must feel contented, it’s a saving of time—a home where you may form valuable connections, and reckon among your acquaintance the foremost business men One need not then run about the place begging for names to a bill—one may even have the chance of becoming director of the savings bank, and feel secure that the money one has the use of is not recalled at inconvenient times, and so on, and so on, as far as you like. The advantages of possessing what is called influence”

“Bills, bills,” shouted the doctor excitedly; “why must you absolutely have bills? Extend the business as you get on and make money.”

“Yes, there you are—there’s the rub—” here Kjel stopped short, apparently in despair at having to explain himself to such uncomprehending people—“I will attempt to make it clear to you, father—just tell you, that a man who carries on a big business is always in want of money. It is like water to the wheel. The more business he does, the more money he wants And then, of course, a good deal depends whether one can work one’s way to obtain influence and credit—and especially to an important position in the banks If I were only a director in the savings bank, they would all have to come to me—every business man in the district—to get his bills discounted—Aha!”

Mrs. Borvig gave a deep groan and sighed.

“Goodness knows, mother, why you mix yourself up in this. It will only worry and trouble you. I should say it’s my business and my back that will have to bear the brunt of it or if father, perhaps, will pay for the house, I shall feel much obliged,” he said, jestingly.

“The boy must manage his business as he thinks best, mother—I see no other way,” opined the doctor.

“In any case, you ought to have thought of paying back your father some of what you owe him. It looks so unreliable, Kjel.”

“It’s very kind of you, I’m sure, mother, to talk of that just now—very kind indeed” blurted

Kjel. "At any rate, Thekla and I agreed that we should tell you this afternoon that we have made up our minds to get married before Christmas, and then get the building so far ready, that we can move into the new house for the summer."

The veins in the doctor's forehead began to swell ; he looked at his wife, and she at him. . . .

"Your mother thinks, Kjel, that you ought to wait till you have something substantial to set up house with, before you think of getting married and of building."

"In other words, till I'm rich, mother—till I can dispose of the saw-mill and retire on my money—say in thirty years— — —No, indeed, Thekla and I will have to take our chance, and face the future for better or worse, . . . besides, I can't stand it any longer, that she should go on slaving and wearing herself out at the judge's. . . . So now you know our plans," he added, as he strolled out ; "you cannot treat me quite like a child, either. . . ."

Mrs. Borvig, pale with agitation, remarked sharply :

"Well, Borvig, I think we must set ourselves tooth and nail against this, as far as our influence and authority go. Then, at any rate, we shall have done what we could ; for it will never end well if it is to begin in this way."

"There you are again—you never will understand that boy!" said the doctor, springing up—"Kjel is,

after all, one of those who cannot have his interests divided. He puts his whole heart and soul into all he does. Formerly his mind was completely taken up with the saw-mill—now it is quite taken up with Thekla Feiring. That's just his strength—which you'll never understand, Bente. . . . The best thing after all will be to let him have her, and then the rest will work itself right. What else has he been doing but rushing to and fro to Judge Preus' from early last winter till now? It has almost become the usual reply down at the mill, I hear, that he is not there. . . . Things will never be right until they are married, I can quite see that! . . . Let them marry; the sooner the better!"

A silence ensued, which was only broken when the doctor turned over the paper he was reading.

Steps were heard upstairs, pacing to and fro, and occasionally, during the grey, wet afternoon, the sound was heard of people scraping their feet outside, and entering the kitchen.

Minka glided softly into the room, and began searching for something on the music stand and the piano which she could not find. Then she went to the work table and to the console, among the nick-nacks and photographs. . . . "It's only my thimble, . . ." she explained, while her hands cautiously felt about to avoid upsetting anything.

"No, not here either, . . ." she looked round for other possible places. . . .

"Just fancy, Thekla is going up to town on Thursday to buy her trousseau," she remarked, carelessly.

"Indeed!—father and I have not heard anything about that as yet," replied her mother, in a voice which trembled with indignation.

"Well, at any rate they are talking about it—she and Kjel, . . . and so I thought. . . ."

"Well, well, mother," said the doctor, soothingly, looking at her, as she sat as if quite lost, appealing to the four walls, "they can't go so very far, no farther than the money reaches."

"Far, far over our heads," muttered his wife.

"You have such a way of painting everything in black, pitch-black," burst out the doctor. He knew it was unbearable, when his wife got these fits of despair. "Why are you standing there, wriggling about, Minka?" he exclaimed. "Is there anything the matter with you as well? I declare, mother, you depress us all so much with your misgivings, that we shall go mad at last."

"I was thinking," stammered Minka, "I have really been thinking about it so long—quite since last summer—that—that I should speak to you about it—ask if—if I might not go up to town for the winter. . . . I should so much like to be on my own account for a time. I feel I am losing my self-reliance by always going about here as a child and daughter of the house. . . . And then I

thought that Kjel and Thekla might easily find some place for me, where I could live."

"Quite easily. . . . Very cleverly thought out Quite wonderfully planned. . . . It can be managed as easily as anything—if only you've got the money to pay with, ha, ha, ha! Yes indeed, a brilliant idea!"

"I suppose Minka is thinking about her further development, Borvig," said her mother, coming to Minka's assistance.

"I do so long to get away from this continual sameness here," burst out Minka, without attempting to restrain herself any longer.

"Oh yes! mother and I would also like to get away—I should very much like to be pensioned off and live in town, instead of driving about here attending to my practice day after day. . . . To speak the truth, I think you ought to be ashamed of yourself, Minka, to come with such a proposal now, when you know how much money we have to pay out in all directions.

"Well, if I don't get away—if I have to stop at home this winter also then I don't care to live no, no," she cried, while despair burned in her pale face.

"It's anæmia!—this is nothing else but anæmia, Bente she must have some iron pills—plenty of physical work in the house, instead of all this high-flown, over-strained intellectual nonsense—you

see what it leads to, Bente! Bless me, how she exaggerates everything. . . .”

He stopped suddenly in his walk!

“Why doesn't Minka, for instance, help you in the housekeeping? — — Why must you everlastingly be on the trot from early morning till evening, while your lady daughter lies in bed and rests—and must be left in peace to read interesting works—and to think about her soul, her sympathies, and her sentiments? Why, I ask you, why lie awake and worry about the future of woman and all sorts of fads?” he thundered. “No wonder you cannot sleep, when the body gets no exercise the whole of the day—no wonder you are pale and ill Why, in the name of common sense, can't we get rid of one of the servants, Bente, and let Minka help you?”

“Minka is not exactly suited for hard work, Borvig—so little adapted for it; but you know very well I had thought of it.”

“Why not suited for it?—” the doctor went on. “Just because she has not been accustomed to use her hands and bodily strength in practical work. All these confounded interests, as they call them, were of course so much more important. . . . Just stop that blubbing, Minka,” he shouted, stamping his foot. “Yes, there she is, possessed by some or other of these wild notions. Now she wants to go up to town—actually to town—to a higher sphere. . . . But look here, my girl, there shall be none of that—

until you can earn the money for yourself, and be your own mistress. . . . From to-day it must be arranged so, that you lead a different and more healthy life . . . first of all your health must be restored. . . . I *will* have it so, Bente. She must take up and be responsible for that part of the household work which you consider most suitable—ironing, darning stockings, and sewing, so that her time is filled up like that of any other useful being's."

"You can compel me, of course, father," said Minka, turning pale. "But I think I also have a right to improve myself, and follow my natural bent, and if that is to be denied me"

Kjel's laughter and noisy chatter with Thekla was heard in the hall.

"That'll do, Minka," the doctor interrupted harshly—"I will have no exhibition of such domestic scenes before strangers. . . ."

The door opened, and Thekla came laughing and tumbling into the room, apparently having received a push from behind.

With an offended look she hastily drew herself up, and took a seat near Mrs. Borvig, while Kjel strolled jauntily round the room.

"There was something we had to talk over with your father and mother," Thekla reminded him.

Kjel stopped with the tips of his fingers stuck in his waistcoat pockets, and remarked with a non-chalant air :

“Oh, by-the-by! Thekla and I are going up to town on Thursday to buy her trousseau and the things for the house I have worked it out and find it will be cheaper to buy everything at the same time—furniture and all—so that everything in the new house shall harmonise.”

“H’m—yes but what about the money, Kjel?” objected the doctor sharply.

“Pooh, I can get as much as I want now from the bank, and pay it back by instalments at my leisure. Whether I make the bill one or two thousand is all the same to them.”

“I suppose there is really nothing, then, that you wish to have your parents’ opinion about,” said Mrs. Borvig coldly, her lips tightly compressed.

Thekla fixed her small, round, black eyes on Mrs. Borvig.

“I should like you to understand that I’ll have nothing whatever to say as to *how much* Kjel ought to buy. I have only asked, that what we buy shall be to our own taste.”

“It’s just this—” continued Kjel, placing his finger on his nose, and looking confidentially through his half-closed eyes at his father—“I shall save a couple of hundred at least—perhaps three, if I am very lucky—if I make the bill two thousand, and buy it all wholesale.”

“No one can wish more than I that you should become a rich man,” exclaimed Mrs. Borvig with a

deep sigh, "after all your calculations and speculations," she added half aloud.

"I dare say it goes a little beyond the ideas of every-day household economy, mother. . . . You would have me save the skilling and let the dollar go," said Kjel, in an off-hand, confident way, dragging one foot after the other, as he paced up and down the room.

"I have been looking at you, Minka," said Thekla, breaking the painful silence. "Is there anything the matter? You look so poorly."

Thekla's lively eyes glanced searchingly from the doctor to his wife and back again. She then exchanged a look with Minka and met with a shake of the head in reply.

"In a house like ours one is obliged to renounce so much, but one can live happily for all that," said Mrs. Borvig, seriously, with a severe look at Thekla. "Minka has just been told that we cannot afford to let her stay in town for the winter."

Kjel continued walking up and down, muttering, and reasoning with himself as if he only felt still more confirmed in his theory of "save the skilling, etc."

"I have . . . been counting so much upon this winter," said Minka, softly, with sobs in her voice.

"We shall all have to accustom ourselves to disappointments," remarked her mother.

"I would willingly have worked night and day,"

asserted Minka, "if it were only something I took an interest in."

"One should always take an interest in one's work, Minka," said the doctor, cutting her short.

Kjel stood rocking himself to and fro, his hands in his pockets. With a glance at Thekla, whose eyes sparkled with excitement, he began:

"I wonder if the same beautiful sentence could not be used to comfort those who are spending their days in a convict-prison, father."

"I don't understand at all why I exist," burst out Minka, excitedly, "if I cannot be allowed to do what I take an interest in . . . but must always be kept back and shut in on all sides. . . . It is suffocating. . . . If I cannot follow up that for which I have an inclination and desire, then I can't understand why I should go on living."

"Then you'd better leave it alone," answered the doctor, severely.

"I never asked to be put into the world," she sobbed.

"I suppose you think that I stood, cap in hand, bowing and asking *my* parents," retorted the doctor.

"Children are not born so entirely without rights," broke in Thekla, bitterly. "There must surely be some responsibility at least between human beings."

"It is just that which we parents feel so sorely," suddenly interposed Mrs. Borvig. "I think we may say we pluck the down off our own breasts, so that

we almost lay ourselves bare, for every child we have—stake our whole existence and happiness for their sake. . . . It is, perhaps, only our instinct so to speak. . . . And when our children reason about it, and ask us why the world which they have come into is as it is, we have only our worn-out souls and bodies to answer with, my dear Thekla," said Mrs. Borvig, her voice trembling with suppressed emotion.

Minka glided hastily across the room, sat down behind her mother's chair, and threw her arms passionately round her mother's neck.

"There, there, mother," said the doctor in a playful tone. "Don't take it so much to heart. You know children are such cannibals."

While it rained and dripped continuously outside, the conversation later in the twilight turned upon the trousseau, which was discussed and settled with the aid of Minka.

Thekla's dainty buttoned boots appeared now and then in the gleam from the stove, as she swayed backwards and forwards in her rocking-chair, on the back of which Kjel's arm rested. Berthea lay on her knees in front of the stove, keeping her eyes on the apples she was roasting in the cinders, and from time to time proffering opinions which she was sure were of more value and importance than the others seemed to think.

Over in the darkest part of the room, just behind

the rocking-chair, Schulteiss, his hands behind him, walked to and fro, his steps small and measured, since there was only room for short turnings.

He was all ears, straining every nerve to glean from the conversation any hint as to whether she had really got permission to carry out this most fatal idea of hers—to spend the winter in town under the influence of this Mr.

Suddenly he turned round with a bright smile.

There was not a word about Minka's trip to town.

V

KJEL was a popular fellow. He drove about with his wife, paying visits, and the standing joke on entering a house was always the same cheerful and merry one: "New sledge, new bearskins, new wife." He dared not say "new filly," which on the first occasion, in a moment of inspiration, had almost escaped him. But the cream-coloured mare had really only just been bought, and was, besides, a trotter of which he need not be ashamed—eight miles in three-quarters of an hour; only an hour and a half all the way to the judge's.

The judge himself received them ceremoniously and gallantly at the front door, offered Mrs. Kjel his arm, escorted her to the sofa in the drawing-room, brought out his best Madeira, and declared he would have done the same if his clerk had been appointed lord-lieutenant; so what would he not do for a young lady who had always been of the same opinion as himself about the one idea which was worth anything at all nowadays—cremation? He would now show her the statement of the expenses

in four different countries, and the number of cremations during the last year.

On the various visits which Kjel and his wife paid there was much stiffness and uneasiness at first as to whether Thekla would be pleased with her reception and the position assigned her. It was not an easy thing—and it had to be gone through in the same way as when a recruit mounts his steed for the first time—to accustom the ladies of the district to treat one who, only two months before, had been a governess, as one who was now their full equal in rank. The recollection was too fresh, and their demeanour became somewhat severe and stiff, when the newly-made wife determinedly, and as a matter of course made her way to the sofa and nonchalantly seated herself.

Kjel would then, where it was convenient, have his little private conference with the master of the house. . . . Good opportunity to get money now, if you want any, he would say with a good-humoured wink—from my good friend the bank director—a relative of my wife, by-the-by. He has asked me to give him my opinion about the state of affairs up here—the people's standing, of course . . . and a word from me . . . of course, he would prefer, he said, if I myself would back the bills, but, no thank you, I am much obliged to him ; I understand his little game. A sly, old fox, you see. . . . Oh yes, I dare say, if he got me to back them . . .

but between you and me—a word of recommendation from me would not be out of the way, just now consequently I only recommend what is as good as gold. And it isn't all bad gold that glitters, eh? Ah well, it was only a little friendly hint—in case—you might possibly—well, you know now what I can do.”

With a certain superior, mystic, business air, they would then return to the comfortable drawing-room, where Thekla's presence undeniably had the effect of a wet blanket upon the ladies, no less by her fashionable toilette and her long elegant gloves, than by her superior dissertations on higher subjects.

But Thekla never intended to yield to these ladies ; she had quite made up her mind to come off victorious in the struggle.

“My good parents believe, of course, that I have been doing nothing but amuse myself the whole time, eh?” said Kjell on one of his confidential visits to his father and mother. “Not at all. . . . I have got up a company for buying the whole of the Black Forest—4000 acres! Don't be afraid, mother!—No, I am not in it, that is to say, if I don't choose—I am helping some of the buyers to get the money in town— —I prepare the possibility — —no, I am not in it there is only one thing I have reserved myself—the trifling stipulation, that all the timber shall be sawn at my mill—

just about 1500 dozen in the course of this and next year."

"But this sounds well—quite sensible, Borvig," exclaimed his mother suddenly, with tears in her eyes.

"Just listen to mother! Now she lifts her eyes to heaven because she has discovered that her son has a bit of common sense in his skull."

"And no risk, Kjel?" said his mother, trying him once more.

"None at all, mother,— —only that I may count upon double profit, when we get the railway ready."

Mrs. Borvig wept.

"I was so much in need of some good news, my dear boy," she sobbed, as she regained her composure, and left the room.

"Mother has become so nervous, I must tell you, Kjel," said the doctor, "we must spare her as much as possible. I expect it is that delightful Mr. Endre, who is worrying her to death. . . . I don't want to ask her how much of the money, the two thousand, she has left; it might wound her feelings. If you can find it out on the quiet, let me know; but not to-day—she cannot stand any more just now."

"Tut, tut! I suppose I could put a little towards it. Things are surely not so bad that we can't afford to keep one person going with so much a month till we get some sort of result, father. He

is mad, of course ! But his own family cannot very well consign him right off to the asylum, either, without having had a fair trial. I am awfully sorry for mother. . . . And she has such wonderful judgment, too, when it comes to the point. For instance, this about the Black Forest—she saw it at once—in a moment !”

“ Well there, you see, Bente,” said the doctor later on, “ was I right or not when I said that Kjel would soon be himself again when he got married ? Now the mill is in full work, and the sawdust is flying right and left. . . . It’s quite a pleasure to stand here and look at the lights down there in the evenings before one goes to bed.”

“ Yes, it really seems as if things are coming right now,” acquiesced his wife thoughtfully.

What with all sorts of parties and visiting, Kjel’s honeymoon lasted till the spring, when the snow began to melt and the sledges could no longer be used.

The work on the new railway had already begun on the other side of the river, and the whistle of the locomotive could be heard in and out of season. Short, shrill shrieks ; long continuous signalling ; the low thunder of dynamite explosions, as if there was always something amiss—disturbed the usual quietness of the district, and made people start up nervously in their sleep at night.

Schulteiss could not tolerate all this screeching. He would stop in the middle of the lessons, draw up one leg and grin, as if the whining sounds went through his bones and marrow.

How heartily he hated all this noise. He would grind his teeth and press his nails into his hands.

Minka had become more regular all at once in taking the morning walks which her father had so strictly insisted upon. Schulteiss heard her downstairs early in the morning, as she put on the neat, new goloshes, which Kjel had made her a present of, and hurried out in her pretty cloak with a becoming veil round her hat as a protection against freckles and the weather. She would take her walks in different directions, sometimes towards the sheriff's, sometimes to the tenant's settlements in the forest, or down towards the saw-mill.

Shortly afterwards, Schulteiss, with the cautious, searching look of the sportsman, hurriedly descended the front door steps. He crossed field after field; climbed along the hillsides, followed the path behind the fence, or hurried across the doctor's moorland property and round the hill behind the summer-house. His object was to reach unseen a point from which he could command a view of Minka's movements. For whatever direction she took, her walk invariably brought her into the main road leading to the railway bridge.

This had been her walk every morning for the

last week, and she had always been so anxious to have Berthea with her. It was only since the day before yesterday, when Mr. Varberg had appeared at the end of the bridge and so gallantly conducted them on their way home, that she found it necessary for her health to rise so early that her sister did not care to accompany her.

And sure enough—his sharp eyes never deceived him—Mr. Varberg was there to-day also to meet her. He had come from some place near the bridge and was now walking back with her.

Yes—just so far, that they could not be seen from the windows at Elvsæt—so far and no farther strange to say, exactly to that point—he could even lay down the line.

And there they remained standing—why didn't they go another twenty or thirty paces, right up to the gate?—There they would apparently have remained, if Miss Minka—fortunately for the sake of propriety—had not been obliged to be home so punctually at eight o'clock to pour out the tea at breakfast.

With long strides he walked homewards to be able to meet her, as if by accident, in the hall or on the steps, and anxiously read or guess from her mysterious, sparkling eyes and animated face, whether it was to be the path—the one leading straight down to the river—that he must take. He saw it as plainly as if it were an inky line across the snow, going

straight, direct towards the whitish-greenish pieces of ice, which in their half-melted condition were floating down with the stream, passing over the inscrutable darkness below them.

Afterwards he went on with his studies up in his room, irritably clawing the backs of his hands. . . . Had anything happened? Was she lost to him or only on the way to become so? He gave himself up to wild, furious ravings, while pacing up and down the room. He would he would

In the afternoon Minka stole up to the yellow drawing-room. She stood by the furthest window, from whence she could see the light, grey cutting on the railway over there. Varberg had taken up his quarters only about two miles to the south on a farm by the river.

She listened and listened. She gave a start every time the steam whistle shrieked through the air. It seemed to convey mystical messages to her—Shrill hisses sharp, short blasts long melancholy wailings sudden, wild threatenings, impregnated by a strong will, which impelled irresistibly. It hissed and wheezed maliciously, virulently, scoffingly—with long drawn-out echoings.

When the shriekings broke into deep, long, monotonous dronings, she listened in a pale ecstasy.

It was his will which built a bridge through the air across to her. She saw it weaving itself into a

fine network of gossamer—across which she had to walk on the strength of his will alone—on higher and higher arches through the air.

The sound rose into a wild, anxious shriek, and then suddenly all was quiet. . . .

It was her fault. She was not a sufficiently good medium was unable to receive the whole of his will. . . .

Far below, the black foaming river rushed wildly on.

She must again venture further out on this bridge of will ; for the shriek arose again, shrill, impelling, dominating.

She was floating, floating—till she suddenly, and to her great horror, discovered that she no longer belonged to herself, that she was passing over into another's—into his entity and will vanishing, losing her soul—inexorably, irrevocably.

She saw his face, with the veiled, mysterious smile of yesterday, which told so surely that his was the power. . . .

Soon after dinner Varberg came suddenly into the room, where Mrs. Borvig and Minka were sitting, and asked for the doctor, who he knew was expected home. One of his workmen had injured himself and required the doctor's attention.

He looked about—as if he wanted to see through the open door into the dining-room—to ascertain, of course, if Thekla was there. How tiresome that he

could not tolerate her, thought Minka. But she understood him so little really. And, besides, she had changed a good deal, and was now married and quite taken up with the importance of her new position.

He would wait, he said, till the doctor came—but did not wish to disturb them. He asked Mrs. Borvig for permission to sit and read the papers meanwhile Now and then he pulled out a memorandum book and began some calculations, his thoughts apparently busily engaged on the work going on over at the railway.

Berthea came and whispered a message to her mother, who rose and left the room.

Minka knew that Berthea and Massy would be on the watch in the other room, and that it was only a stratagem of Berthea's to get her mother out. Her vivacious mind was full of wild ideas. She had become so remarkably considerate in not pressing her company upon Minka in the mornings.

The door in the other room opened, and the cautious steps of a man were heard crossing the floor

Ugh! was Schulteiss about again with his unbearable jealousy?

She would have risen, but was prevented by Varberg's eyes, which became involuntarily fixed upon her while busy with his calculations They gazed thoughtfully and intensely at her, with a blue-greyish light glimmering from far within

them—they fixed themselves repeatedly upon her, each time for longer and longer.

The memorandum book lay upon the table in a gleam of sunlight, his hand with the pencil resting upon it The look was so absent-minded and absorbed that she could not evade it. It was as if it came from his dream-life to something far within herself. Her eyes followed his powerless hand. It seemed as if the pencil began to trace characters—to write slowly—letter after letter till at last they became a whole line in large, plain writing, and, as if by a jerk, the hand was carried back. A new line was begun and again a new one

Everything within her seemed to become paralysed by a drowsiness—from which she could not possibly rouse herself the letters swam before her on the table, becoming larger and plainer, as if she were looking through some bewildering magnifying-glass. She thought she saw a grey, misty hand in the gleam of sunlight stretched towards the pencil

Without knowing it she moved towards him and looked over his shoulders.

She read :

“Your spirit speaks with hers of that which you do not yourselves understand.”

She looked into the wonderful depth of his sparkling eyes ; she felt him putting his arm round her waist and pulling her down on his lap—and

before she could prevent it, he had pressed a passionate kiss on her lips.

Taken thus by surprise, she stared in consternation at him, trying to discover—as if by a sudden flash of magnesium light—by his face and person, if he—he really were the man she would give herself up to. The half-playful, self-confident smile, which rested upon her, filled her with fear.

Like a sudden panic the feeling of fear came again upon her, she felt that she was losing her own individuality—being mysteriously bound by some compact which lay outside her will and power.

She pushed him from her with a slight scream and a bewildered look towards the door. At the same moment she heard her mother's step outside, and hastily sat down at the work-table, red and excited, bending her head over her sewing.

In her confusion and fear that her mother might have noticed something, she scarcely had time to wonder at his audacity and self-possession, as he, coolly and unconcernedly, turned half round to Mrs. Borvig, his eyes apparently fixed on his memorandum book, and said with a veiled, tremulous look at Minka :

“ I have made good use of my time, Mrs. Borvig ; I have finished the whole calculation for one of the railway curves north of this place.”

While Mrs. Borvig was busy preserving straw-

berries in the afternoon, her mind was filled with anxious thoughts about Minka.

She was altogether too easy of approach. One burning interest succeeded another. Apparently she had now lost all inclination for writing, and all her ambition in that direction seemed to be gone These visits of Varberg to the family, which became more and more frequent, might easily lead to something else . . . he was not exactly the one she would have liked for Minka—he did not give the impression of being one who would sacrifice much in his relations with one. Not exactly gentle or pliable But he was, at any rate, a clever, energetic young man and honestly and wholly infatuated by these spiritualistic ideas. . . . But Minka would never find any one who cared so much for her as poor, poor Schulteiss.

The doctor was long in returning. He must have gone to attend some other patient, so Varberg remained through the evening, deeply absorbed in spiritualistic conversation with Minka.

Schulteiss was the restless spirit in the room. He glided in and out, obstinately maintaining an antipathetic silence towards Varberg, who, evidently guessing what was passing in Schulteiss' mind, amused himself and egged him on by becoming doubly attentive and communicative to Minka.

Schulteiss was not to be deceived. He had a presentiment that something was in the air. . . .

These strange answers that Minka gave Varberg—it really seemed as if the two were carrying on a deeply interesting guerrilla warfare with one another. . . . One moment she would look at him as if offended, the next as if defying him—and there could be no mistake about it—her hand trembled and she changed colour, as with an affected air she handed him his tea-cup.

Since early in the afternoon Schulteiss' irritability had been steadily increasing. He would—quite unconcernedly, quite dispassionately, and as if it were nothing to him—intellectually reduce, crush, this insignificant being . . . right before Minka's eyes, expose this preaching lady-hypnotiser, who was sitting there holding forth before the whole family upon phenomena and possibilities in the mystic world, as dryly, curtly and obviously, as if he were discussing doorposts and windows. . . . But there should be an end to this !

“Pardon me,” he began suddenly in a savage tone, with a wild gleam in his eyes, “I believe that you, Mr. Varberg, may personally be in possession of both magnetic and hypnotic powers—which, by-the-by, a good many possess. For instance, my eyes have a certain power” here he gave a keen glance at Minka, “but a deeper, scientific—pardon me if I have my doubts. . . . As it happens, I have given this subject some attention ; and I may say that you cannot get to the bottom of it quite off-

hand—profitable though it may be to popularity-professors. . . .”

“I bow to your superior wisdom, Mr. Schulteiss,” retorted Varberg in a sarcastic tone, without allowing himself to be interrupted in his discourse. “We are in the midst of researches about a still more far-reaching struggle for life than has hitherto been heard of,” he continued. “The stronger compels the weaker, independent of space, by will-power alone. . . .”

Minka felt his glance through the twilight to where she sat in the shadow of the stove.

“H’m, h’m!” began Schulteiss in a whining voice, “we shall then have quite a fantastic belief in spiritualism—founded on a science of nerve physiology.”

“I refer exclusively to the facts we get, Mr. Schulteiss—by scientific methods. If the experiment shows me an Indian, I believe it is an Indian; and if it reveals a spirit to me, I do not flinch from that fact either.”

“Pardon me,” said Schulteiss, bowing and smiling sardonically and jerking his neck in remonstrance, “this scientific method of obtaining results depends altogether upon who it is that experiments. In the hands of the faddist it is apt to bring forth a whole world of ghostly Indians.” He looked across at Minka to see if he made any impression on her. “Ghosts with all sorts of heads and tails which; I

believe, has been the case. . . . And believers there are always in plenty—imagination appeals, as you know, to imagination, Mr. Varberg—it spreads like fire, till it becomes a spiritual epidemic altogether. We shall have witches and sorcerers in our daily life, an abundance of lay-preachers for the cause, and all sorts of magnetically gifted capacities, who perform wonders on nervous people, and especially on ladies undergoing hypnotic treatment. . . . Most dangerous individuals, Mr. Varberg.”

“I’ll only remark,” retorted Varberg flippantly, with suppressed rage, “that psychic energy is the latest great discovery of mankind. Compared with this power, that of steam and electricity count for nothing.”

Schulteiss turned suddenly round and looked ironically at him through half-closed eyes.

“I have read it—read it—hee, hee!—all in the introduction to three spiritualistic works—the self-same expressions, Mr. Varberg. Exactly the same words—about these supernatural wonders of our will, . . . they always prove effective to the gallery. . . . But that which science establishes cannot *eo ipso* be beyond our means of understanding, which, as experiments show, can only be our perception of the material. An immaterial spirit finds itself absolutely outside the line, Mr. Varberg. I may possibly believe in its existence, but shall never be able to perceive it with my senses.”

“ You can even photograph it,” Varberg informed him, in a weary, indifferent voice.

“ Excuse me, if I permit myself on this point also to go somewhat deeper into the subject, Mr. Varberg. . . . There is really no rational objection to being able to photograph our ideas. Memory is, we know, a photographic apparatus, full of pictures in layers, so to speak, which the imagination creates and which photography ought to be able to reproduce, if they were only sufficiently intense. The Icelanders see in their ‘ Skinlæka ’ the image of an absent one. If you are thinking of any one who is on the point of death, he will appear to you. . . . It is all energetic will-currents, which we must presume by some unknown law or other, like electricity, transmit the conceptions independent of our usual conception of time and space. But science—science, Mr. Varberg—knows nothing whatever about ghosts, or ghosts which write. It still abides by the probability that these phenomena are due to our own unconscious production.”

“ You speak like a well-trained university professor Mr. Schulteiss. But you see, the age of doctrines and pedagogues”

“ You mean popularised science, ha ha! So psychic power is a new discovery !”

Schulteiss stopped again suddenly in the middle of the room. “ As if all mythology and the Bible are not full of it! Apollonius of Tyana,

Alexander Aboniticus, and a whole series of miracle-mongers about the time of Christ. . . . You should study those things, Mr. Varberg, and you would be surprised to find what antiquated experiences people now permit themselves to dish up as new—quite brand new—not to mention the account of Simon Magus, which, of course, you know Eh!—you don't?—He's mentioned, among other places, in the Acts of the Apostles, *Acta Apostolorum*”

Schulteiss looked around him with an air of self-satisfaction and enjoyment, feeling that in the eyes of Minka he had come off victorious; his falsetto voice, and the numerous positions he assumed became more and more ridiculous.

“He could, according to the testimonies of that time, perform all miracles, appear in different places at the same time, see what happened afar off, vanish before the eyes of his judges, and so forth and so forth. When he began preaching false doctrines St. Peter followed him, according to Bible history, to Rome, to take up his stand against him. There Simon Magus ascended into the air, before Emperor Nero's eyes—the same trick, by-the-by, which the Indian fakirs perform. But it goes on to say, that when St. Peter prayed against him and defeated him by his higher power, he was dashed to the ground and perished. . . . And then to give out—to cram down our throats, to trumpet forth as something new—that power which Christ, eighteen

years ago characterised as the one which could move mountains. . . .”

Confident of having triumphed, Schulteiss paced up and down the room with long demonstrative strides, his half-closed eyes fixed on the ceiling.

Varberg was becoming exasperated, but smiled derisively at Schulteiss' figure and movements, which he appeared to follow with some surprise.

“ Really,” continued Schulteiss, in a voice quivering with contempt, “ I must call it a shallow, most commonplace sign of the times, Mr. Varberg—this general gambolling in devil-worship and spirit incantations, and mystic superstition, which, in the exciting times when any new doctrine has been preached, has always played such a *rôle* in the imagination of the half-cultured I would not—I do not refer to any one in particular ; I only refer to the movement itself,” he shouted. “ I would not really condescend to throw myself into this common—vulgar—ephemeral wave of excitement—and be polluted, drowned—driven to suicide” He bent his knees and looked up at the ceiling, as if to represent the act of hanging himself.

Varberg leant back comfortably in his chair, as if he was thoroughly enjoying the comedy. His critical reflections betrayed themselves from time to time in a look, full of pent-up raillery, which he shot across at Minka and Berthea.

“ Most interesting a jealous philosopher

... passionately jealous," he began to mutter mockingly. "I mean, of course, from a scientific standpoint," he corrected himself, with an insolent twinkle in his eyes. "'The jealous philosopher,' a splendid title for a play . . ." He smiled provokingly at Minka, as if he had no doubt whatever of her—the pupil's—enthusiastic blind admiration for the teacher, and that she might also have her part to play in it.

"Before I would join in this blind, idiotic dance of the masses, this can-can," . . . began Schulteiss again, as he tripped across the room, and finished with a kick.

"Could you not deliver your discourses without accompanying them with dancing as well?" burst out Minka, as she jumped up and impatiently pushed back her chair, "I really cannot stand it. . . ."

Schulteiss stopped suddenly, and stared at her with a bewildered expression, as if he had fallen from his pinnacle, and were sinking slowly through infinite space. His expression became confused, almost idiotic; he had evidently some difficulty in taking in the situation.

"I maintain—maintain my standpoint!" he shrieked, quite beside himself with sudden passion and shaking his clenched fists threateningly.

No one answered, and he stood staring and looking about him in painful silence. . . .

With a shy look at Minka, he stammered almost inaudibly :

“ I understand I shall not—inconvenience you with my presence.”

He gave Varberg a scornful infuriated look, and went fumbling his way out of the room.

Mrs. Borvig followed close behind him up the stairs.

“ Mr. Schulteiss, Mr. Schulteiss—you must not take it so to heart.”

He did not hear; he rushed into his room, and threw himself on his face on the bed.

“ Mr. Schulteiss, I tell you, you must not take it so seriously—you must not take any notice of an over-hasty word.”

Schulteiss buried his face in the pillow.

“ You, who understand so well how to speak for yourself.”

His deformed back shook with convulsive jerks, while stifled, smothered sounds like suppressed sobs were heard from the pillow; they increased more and more, till they rose to a wild howl. Mrs. Borvig sat down on the edge of his bed and took his hand, which lay back, and held it in hers.

“ You take it far too much to heart—” she said, when there was a moment’s silence. “ You—who had such superior arguments—and came off undoubtedly the best.”

No answer.

“ I assure you—I thought from the beginning that you were completely master of the subject. . . . The fact is, that you had the better of the argument altogether, Mr. Schulteiss.”

Schulteiss groaned and turned his head a little.

“ Ah, so you are good enough to say, Mrs. Borvig. . . . ”

He wanted to bury his head in the pillow again, but Mrs. Borvig patted him comfortingly on the shoulder.

Her touch had a sudden effect upon him, and he immediately sat up on the side of the bed.

“ Your opinion, Mrs. Borvig—you are the person I have most respect for in the world . . . forgive me, excuse me. . . . ”

“ I can also tell you,” she said, rising, “ that this is really Minka’s opinion as well.”

“ Do you think so ? . . . Do you really believe it possible, Mrs. Borvig ? . . . ”

“ I could see quite well what she was thinking, during the discussion,” she persisted.

“ Did you notice—did you see Mrs. Borvig—that she — — ? ”

“ There can be no doubt about that, Mr. Schulteiss.”

“ You believe, Mrs. Borvig, that Minka really—that she at least appreciated—I mean, partly shared my views ? ”

“ I am quite sure of it, Mr. Schulteiss.”

“ I will confide to you, Mrs. Borvig, that I have

purposely availed myself of every opportunity to undermine this Mr. Varberg's pernicious influence upon Minka's nerves. . . . No good character either . . . quite a suspicious . . ."

Mrs. Borvig stood as if she was thoughtfully considering.

"You have had your large share in Minka's education as well, Mr. Schulteiss. I do not know if you feel as I do—that we have been a little too sure about her—that she still is ours. . . . It is foolish, I know; still I seem to dread the time when she will be separated from me. . . . And I thought that you, Mr. Schulteiss, might understand this. . . . I often think to myself that I must not be too selfish.—I must accustom myself in time to meet the inevitable. . . ."

He tried to fathom what her meaning might be, and his face gradually assumed a grotesque expression of dismay.

"But Minka—Minka," he exclaimed passionately. . . . "It must not be forgotten—or overlooked, that she is in every respect an exceptional person, over whom a protecting hand must be held—one who must be carefully guarded.—A peculiar, highly sensitive and tender nature—one in a thousand . . . so susceptible to every impression, so easily guided . . . truly a phenomenal faculty for absorbing all the ideas of the day . . . a sublime, precious quality. But dangerous—that is her great,

great danger, which cannot have escaped your motherly eye which subjects her for a time—certainly only for a time—to be deceived by every phenomenon which knows how to surround itself with an ideal nimbus. I see the abyss yawning beneath her unsuspecting step. . . . and that I, to-day, like a Curtius, blind to my own destruction, precipitated myself into it.—I do not regret it—I would throw myself a thousand times into it, if I could open her eyes.” He stretched out his arms wildly. “This Mr. Varberg—a superficial humbug!”

“Yes, I know you mean it so well, Mr. Schulteiss. . . . A mother’s and a spiritual teacher’s lot is no better,—to be resigned—to live in the memory of what good we may have done to her . . . one has to make up one’s mind for that.”

She spoke sadly, as if seeking to find comfort in view of the fate that might befall them both.

She had almost got outside the door, when she returned, and said, in an admonishing tone :

“I am thinking, Mr. Schulteiss, that you are really a little too careless about your appearance. I know, of course, you do not trouble yourself about such things, and consider yourself above them. But for all that, you must take a little pride in yourself. . . . I have a nice red necktie in my chest of drawers, which Borvig will not use—he doesn’t like

the colour. You must wear it, Mr. Schulteiss; it will just suit you, quite splendidly. . . . I'll send it up to you."

The door closed.

Schulteiss took a few turns, as if undecided, but stopped, with pursed lips, in front of the little japanned looking-glass, pulled his collar up around his neck, righted himself, raised his chin, buttoned up his coat, and then again unbuttoned it. . . .

It is bright colours one ought to wear! Mrs. Borvig saw that at once—red—blood-red, radical—harmonising at once both with one's person and one's views. . . . So much depends on one's appearance to attract attention and captivate the imagination.

With perpetual changes of necktie and collar, there then followed a series of facial expressions—pathetically threatening, intelligently refined, cunningly insinuating and sarcastic, stately superior, Napoleonicly abrupt—now and then accompanied by gesticulations and half-audible exclamations: "Ghostly Indians! hypnotising lady practitioners! Ah, ha! Some one did strike home—expose this superficial ignorance thrust the steel home a deathly thrust in the most vulnerable part!"

VI

“Is he still asleep, Bente?”

“No, Endre is up,” Mrs. Borvig answered, somewhat hesitatingly.

“A pleasant surprise, isn’t it, to have one’s eldest son return home after such a successful career? No, no; I do not blame you in any way, Bente! The unfortunate two thousand crowns you are thinking of are, after all, a small matter. You will, of course, have to add to that all the unpaid bills which are sure to follow him. . . . It is just a mother like you that such a son worries to death—utilises to the last thread.”

“I ought to tell you, Borvig, that I had a long talk with him last night. He said he was so unhappy, and specially on our account, because he had been such a drain on our purse and disappointed us so much.”

“Yes; *that* sort of person is always so willing to acknowledge his sins and trespasses is never ashamed to avow his own unworthiness.”

“Do not be so hard on him, Borvig. He wants to work—to get some teaching to do, until he can

find some position. He is not blind ; he looks upon himself as one who has gone through bankruptcy and only wants to save the wreck. With his talent for singing he thinks he will be able, without much difficulty, to succeed as an actor. He says it has always been his dramatic talent, more than his singing, which has been appreciated."

"Indeed ! An actor is it to be now ! Ha, ha, ha !" laughed the doctor, walking across the room, panting with excitement.

"Let us remember that he does not care for drink, that he is very sober and abstemious," interposed his wife.

"What I know, I know, my dear Bente a chronic condition of nervous debility with an excited imagination. . . . In my time they took to drink. Nowadays they are the victims of their ever-changing fixed ideas. The old roving, drunken geniuses over again, only in a new form ! They all lack the one necessary thing—the will to work, to be doing something. They return home to the paternal roof at regular intervals, as regular as clockwork, minus clothes and health, each time to be fitted out anew, encouraged, and set on their legs again. I know it, I know it all, Bente. . . . The time is long gone by when they could walk about, acting the interesting prodigal genius on the strength of it. Now we have registered it as an established disease. . . . Such fellows you'll find knocking about in most families."

"I think you are trying to frighten the life out of me, Borvig. Endre hasn't quite come to that, thank God. When he gets into regular work and routine again, then——"

The doctor gave her a peculiar, hurried look.

"Oh, yes! When the fellow finds there is work, then—h'm. . . . Ah, well, try it. Under the circumstances it's the only thing to be done. Mend and dress him up—arrange it all for him. . . . But don't mix me up in it. . . . By-the-by, Bente, let him have his breakfast before he comes to me."

Mrs. Borvig looked dubiously at him.

"I do not want any of his candour or confessions of frailty, you understand. If once he gets the privilege of being considered an object of pity, to drift about like some helpless, leaky boat—well, then," he said, with a flourish of his hand, "the game is up."

As his wife went out, the doctor heard Kjel's voice in the dining-room, saying :

"Well, isn't the genius coming down? It will be jolly to see him again."

Then followed greetings and welcomings, in the midst of which Kjel's loud voice could be heard, as he chatted away in brotherly good humour.

The doctor was turning over the pages of a magazine, dipping his pen in the ink and putting it aside again.

There was a knock, and the door opened slowly.

"Hope I do not disturb you, father. . . . Well, here I am."

"I wish you welcome home."

"Well, I've not exactly come back with laurels this time," said Endre, as he quietly took a seat, "but you must bear with me a little longer."

"Laurels—laurels? Good heavens, I never expected anything so grand of you, my boy. Laurels! Why, there are only one or two in the country who can hope for them."

Endre drew himself up, showing his long, elegant figure to advantage, and ran his fingers through his beautiful dark hair.

"Well, after all, one ought not to boast of what one has not got."

"It strikes me you had better drop these high and lofty airs now, Endre. Be sensible and practical, my boy, as matters now stand."

"Yes, of course, father. You mustn't think I don't see that," burst out Endre, passionately. "If you only knew how many a night I have been lying awake thinking and measuring my abilities and chances—I have cried and been in such despair, that——"

"Well, I too was in despair when I had spent all my money, two years before I took my degree. But then, I knew that no one else would pay for me, that I had better pull myself together and earn the money myself. First of all, I got into an office

where I had to slave ten hours a day, and afterwards I went out as tutor. The last thing I dreamt of doing was to grumble and complain of my lot."

"If you think I come here begging you make a mistake, father. I would rather starve, rather break stones," said Endre, starting up and clenching his fists.

"I should like to see that you were man enough, Endre, to make an effort and become economically independent. For talking and prating and all that sort of thing . . . Well, what are you thinking of doing? . . . I can tell you I am not able to give you any further support. I have got too much upon my hands already, and Arnt and your sisters have also to be helped on in the world."

"I have never asked any such thing of you, father."

"What do you mean by saying you have never asked any such thing of me—directly after you have had twenty thousand odd crowns out of us? Are you mad, or is all you say mere empty talk? Have you never asked for anything?"

"I mean not *now*."

"Yes, by heavens, but you do ask now. Your mother will have to sew and stitch for you, and I'll have to find clothes for your back. Why can't you be straightforward?"

Endre stuck his eyeglass in position, and placed one leg over the other, apparently reviewing the situation in great surprise.

"H'm!—all this sounds very much like a tailor's bill It only wants the items for needles and thread"

"Quite so; even they must be bought. One does not get anything for nothing I suppose it is I who will have to work for it."

"I understand—the prodigal son must again be put through the full confession of sins, wade through his moral A B C in tears"

"Again?—as if he had ever attempted anything of the kind."

". . . . Be bent and twisted—and forced—tortured into domestic pettiness—for edification and repentance. How much this button and that patch cost."

"Not forgetting to take your mother into consideration, Endre, who will have to do all the work and sewing for you."

"Have done—spare me, father Are we now to be sentimental as well?" burst out Endre excitedly, his voice quivering and his face growing darker. "I think you have been piling on the agony enough You have seen me sufficiently crushed and humiliated at your feet It almost borders on And then my own mother! Not even hesitate to use that weapon To drag her across my conscience as if she sat in utter despair stitching and crying and ruining her health sewing till her fingers bled. It is a little too

pathetic, father—over a pair of trousers!—If it only were not so terrible to think of”

“Well, father, you are right this time. I admit you are right. But if you think to cow me, crush me, exterminate that in me which is called ambition—the feeling that I possess talent, that I am an artist, in order to make me earn my bread in some practical way—then you are greatly mistaken in me. I know I have ability; I will not let myself be trodden under foot.”

“No, no, do not let yourself be trodden under foot you shall have board and lodging here this summer and clothes and your travelling expenses; in other words all those little insignificant trifles you will want in order to show yourself again in the world.”

“You mean humiliated, bereft of all self-respect—thanks.”

“In short, my boy, will you have it or will you not have it? I suppose you do not expect that I shall fit you out with the necessary self-respect as well.”

“You do not understand the feelings of an artist, father; you twist my words about.”

“Be good enough to answer me in plain language. Do you accept or do you not accept? I am really mean enough to consider it as a gift—to think it worth something. If you can get along without my help, it will be a great relief to me.”

Endre stared resignedly at the floor.

"Many an artist has been obliged to fight the way for his talent under insulting, mortifying circumstances—like a mother who strives for her child, who does not hesitate to starve or suffer humiliation for it," exclaimed Endre greatly excited, his voice trembling with emotion.

"Pooh! All stuff and nonsense! Isn't it because you have not succeeded as a singer that you have now come home? What kind of an artist—what child—are you talking about?"

"My only mistake was in not knowing in what direction my talent lay—in what particular line I was an artist, father," he said with some assurance.

"Well, show it then in due course. But we two must be agreed that for the present there is no artist, no triumph to be proud of! Only a mistaken career to mourn over—and many wasted years, which we would rather not speak about Now, Endre, will it ever be possible to get you nailed down to stern reality?"

"Truly prosaic language, which it would be difficult to equal, which sweeps away and uproots both one's faith and hope. One is not likely to feel encouraged to go in for anything after that."

"Surely you don't mean to say that the new artist you have just discovered within you is also dead? All that you have been talking about—both the one who was and the one who was to be, exists only in your imagination Try for once to pull

yourself together and make it clear to yourself, lad, what you can do and what you cannot do. Try seriously to discover whether you still have any ability within you, and whether you possess will enough that all shall not end in empty words and smoke I propose, Endre," said the doctor thoughtfully, cutting himself short, "that you take up some work for me, so that you can say you are earning something and paying for your keep—only some copying out, nicely done, you know—two pages every day from this day-book. I cannot very well spare the time for it myself. Take it up with you to your room. But you must show me what you have done every Saturday morning—without my having to remind you of it. Let this be a matter between ourselves."

"You mustn't think, father," exclaimed Endre warmly, "that I have no feelings—I see—I understand that you mean well by me, although I do not exactly"

"Tut, tut, tut no more prating go away, my lad ; I am busy."

The doctor sat thoughtfully polishing his spectacles, his face glistening with perspiration as he held the glasses up against the light.

"Phew!" He took his cap and went outside and began talking to the farm servant about the time the barley should be cut in the field below the garden.

He did not care to meet his wife, whom he knew he should only be worrying; and the sitting-room, with Endre in it, had become unpleasant to him.

He heard the rumbling of wheels on the road, and soon he saw Thekla driving up, and Massy, Arnt, and Minka rushing out on the steps to meet her. Thekla had lately been in the habit of driving up the hill from the mill—in a month or two a little heir was expected.

After having finished his talk about the barley, he examined and gave orders with regard to a couple of rotten laths in the garden fence, and then proceeded to have a good look at that side of the house where the gutter hung down broken. He then walked into the garden, and poked with his stick among the woodbine under the windows.

Kjel's jovial voice could now and then be heard through the window; he was evidently doing his best to enliven the company.

Endre soon caught the infection, became quite animated, and began what seemed to be a recitation.

Suddenly the doctor heard a moan and a cry—and then something like a fall.

He rushed in, and was met in the doorway by Minka, who motioned him to be silent, and whispered that Endre was playing *Hamlet*.

The doctor made a grimace, as if he had a bitter taste in his mouth, stopped, and looked on.

There they were, with Kjel and Thekla, all sit-

ting together as spectators, while Endre was lying on the floor in a half-reclining attitude, whispering with suppressed passion. . . .

Bitter irony could be traced in every word and gesture. The feeling that he, notwithstanding all his will and knowledge, was unable to do anything great—the intelligent, sardonic despair at his own impotence, trembled about his lips. There he lay on the verge of an abyss, looking helplessly at them with a quiet quivering smile—a wreck of intellectual endowments.

The doctor's face showed signs of violent agitation. Why, this was Endre himself—in all his wretchedness!

The doctor suddenly turned round, and drew his wife away with him.

"Perhaps perhaps—you know, this looks really something like. . . . We must certainly encourage him, help him a little. . . . You must try to comfort him, poor fellow. . . . I say, he seemed as if he were lying on burning coals."

"Oh, my God, what misery!" burst out his wife.

"Now, now, mother we must help him, I tell you—do our best to put some courage and confidence into him. We must take him about a little invite people here. It is we, first of all, who should believe in him; they must see that."

Kjel was out in the larder with his mother, eating

with great relish some gingerbread freshly arrived from town, and which he had spread with newly churned butter—while a plate with the same delicacy was being prepared for Thekla, who was resting on the sofa in the sitting-room.

While he was eating he chatted confidentially about his brother. Endre had, of course a screw loose—very loose indeed but what talent! He was, of course, to be pitied, but he shall not be without some one to back him up.

“Well, the battle isn’t lost yet. . . . It’s awfully nice, mother—and the butter churned to-day, isn’t it? I think it will do Thekla good—she is very fond of gingerbread—anything as long as there is honey in it.”

Berthea came running in.

“There is a telegraph messenger outside—with a telegram.”

“Let the man come in. He might have left it as usual, down at the mill, I think, instead of following at my heels. I want to be left in peace when I’m up here.”

Soon after the messenger appeared in the half-open door, and Kjel, still busy eating, opened the envelope with a kitchen knife.

He stared at the telegram for some time, then, with an air of indifference, put it in his coat pocket.

It struck Mrs. Borvig that her son’s face, as he read the telegram, became, for the moment, over-

shadowed with an expression of concern, but no doubt it was only her usual anxiety. . . .

Kjel hastily swallowed his last bit of gingerbread and took Thekla's plate.

"That's quite enough, mother. Thekla will not be able to eat any more. . . . quite enough, I assure you . . . there, do let me take it. . . . By-the-by, do you know what the telegram was all about?" he asked, abruptly. "It's from Wahl himself, the bank director—he's coming up here—wants personally to investigate the state of affairs in the district. We shall have to make some fuss over him, you understand.—If necessary, you'll have to invite him here as well.—He is coming straight to me from the station. That will be about three, or half-past."

Kjel looked hurriedly at his watch, and stood ruminating a moment.

"Rather short notice that, . . . but with my mare, and father's kariol, I'll . . . You must drive Thekla home directly after dinner, mother," he exclaimed.

Scarcely five minutes later the kariol rattled down the road.

Just before noon, while in the middle of the last lesson, Schulteiss, from the schoolroom window, saw Kjel driving at a sharp trot down the hill, with reins well held in.

It did not interest him. He would have taken more notice of a crow or a flying insect.

His reason for continually looking out of the window was to ascertain if Varberg was now beginning to come there for dinner also—to be formally admitted as an intimate friend of the family.

Since last Monday, when he put in an appearance so near the dinner hour that the doctor was obliged to ask him to stay, the possibility of repetitions had weighed anxiously on Schulteiss' mind. This summer Varberg had, up to the present, limited his visits to the hours when the family took coffee or tea. These visits, however, invariably ended in those interesting walks with Minka during which they seemed to be so deeply absorbed in each other's conversation.

It seemed that this gentleman no longer desired a critical audience; he rather avoided any one who was likely to interrupt him in his fulminating and interesting outpourings from the spirit-world.

It was the impressionable womanly pupil—the spiritually subjugated being—that he wanted to secure in her—a medium for his experiments.

But he—Schulteiss—would not give in; he would tear her from the monster—would fight to the last!

Did not *he* know her thoughts? Did not he know

her feelings. Could any one whisper or penetrate to her heart as he? She did not love Varberg. Why, didn't she even hate him?

He observed how, in spite of her fear and resistance, she became overpowered—how she always met Varberg in a strange, shy manner, yet constantly followed him as if bereft of all will-power. And afterwards, when he would suddenly surprise these hypnotised looks, it was always the same—over and over again the same. . . .

She *must* be brought back to herself—out of this terrible, erotic infatuation . . . she must see his—*his*—outstretched arms. . . .

Just then some one appeared down on the road—some one who was continually swinging a thin walking-stick. He stopped from time to time, and looked about him.

Not Varberg!

Ah!—he breathed freely.

A young man.—Yes, he was coming towards the doctor's.

Berthea quite accidentally ran against the new arrival in the hall.

“May I see Mr. Endre Børvig? . . . My name is Finsland—student Finsland. I hear that my friend, Mr. Endre, is home again.”

Berthea bowed in return, ran to the sitting-room door to call Endre, and turned round again to the stranger, saying graciously :

“Won’t you be good enough to walk in?
He’ll be here immediately.”

She ran off and met Minka, who was laying the cloth in the dining-room.

“A student, Minka, who wants to see Endre! Just at dinner-time, too—I must run and tell mother. . . .”

In the sitting-room the young fellows could be heard greeting each other with boisterous joviality, and Endre, with much pomp, introduced Mr. Alvor Finsland, writer and poet :

“My mother—my sister Minka, ditto Berthea. . . .”

He had been in Dresden for some time last winter, with a government allowance. Endre had wanted to sing one of his songs at a concert there, which did not come off.

He was now staying with his uncle Finsland, the inspector of roads in the district, and was finishing a volume of poems.

Mrs. Borvig scrutinised him searchingly.

So this young man was one of Endre’s sort. One who had really attained something. . . . At dinner she could not fail to notice in him a spirit of combativeness. He took note of them all, assumed a polite line of defence in his conversation, or spoke with great self-confidence, according to circumstances—chatted gaily and sportively with Berthea, and listened with flattering attention to every little remark made by Minka.

His short, well-built, elastic figure contrasted strangely with the broad forehead and the small, shrewd chin. They did not seem to fit into one another ; one felt inclined to divide the face below the nose. . . . The cold blue eyes, with their quick, observant look, gave one the impression that, notwithstanding his warm nature, he was infinitely more egoistic and cold-blooded in judging his surroundings than Endre, poor fellow, could ever be.

After dinner the two friends retired to the summer-house, where they began an animated conversation over their cigars. The latest literary and artistic news was discussed in slashing terms, accompanied by a flaying criticism of the corypheuses of the day ; celebrated names were denounced and pulverised as lightly as a branch is stripped of its leaves.

Berthea whisked about within hearing between the spirea hedge and the flower-beds.

The coffee was now brought out to them in the summer-house.

“ Berthea ! I say, Berthea,” called Endre, beckoning and winking mysteriously at her ; “ you most artful of sisters ! ”

Berthea protested vivaciously she was not at all artful. . . . Endre could only remember her as a child !

“ Just listen, Berthea,” said Endre, fanning her

with the corner of her smart apron, "don't you think you could manage to find something which would impart an extra flavour to the coffee—something in small glasses?"

Berthea glanced at the poet and began giggling, her bright face beaming with fun and merriment; then she darted away like an arrow, gathering up the skirt of her blue summer dress round her nimble legs.

She returned with a small bottle of cognac, taken from the doctor's travelling case, a box of matches, and a red wax taper to light the cigars with.

"Sister Berthea, you have surpassed my most sanguine expectations."

"Well, it's only because you have just returned," replied Berthea, with a roguish glance at Finsland. "I remember you well enough, Endre—if I do a thing for you to-day, you demand it as a right to-morrow. . . . Wait a bit!" she exclaimed, striking a match and lighting the wax taper for Finsland.

"Is it less dangerous to do it for *me* then, do you think?" he asked gaily.

"It's only for this once—for really I don't intend striking any more matches for you if you come here again."

"I am sure to come here again. . . . Your voice is so charming, it reminds me of the young Lady Lighthouse."

"Is that in a fairy tale?"

“ No ; it is something which has just struck me.”

“ What is it about ? ”

“ About a beautiful young girl who has never— what shall I call it ?—never suffered from any kind of toothache in the heart, Miss Berthea.”

“ Oh—h ! ” exclaimed Berthea in an offended tone, looking down at the table as if she could, but did not intend, to answer.

“ My heroine suddenly took it into her head never to strike matches for gentlemen any more, except for some old toothless pastor. And that’s just the moral in the fairy tale never to strike matches ; a lady might so easily burn her beautiful—— ”

“ Goodness, what nonsense ! ”

She remained standing, fingering and twisting Endre’s hat, which lay on the stone table.

“ Wait a bit, and I’ll put a gillyflower in it,” she suddenly exclaimed, running off to the flower-bed.

Finsland threw off his hat and rushed after her.

“ Won’t you decorate mine also with one, and then we shall look equally festive ? ”

“ I’m not so sure about that. I haven’t promised you anything at all ! ” was the saucy answer from across the flower-bed. She was, however, taken aback when she saw Finsland suddenly turn away from the broad gravel walk.

He had caught a glimpse of Minka’s dark eyes

and auburn hair as she bent her pretty neck over the hedge.

“ I’ll take refuge with you, Miss Borvig, since your sister is so proud,” he exclaimed. “ I asked her for something pretty for my hat. . . . I can see you don’t like gillyflowers . . . common, vulgar plants, of the same family as the garlic. It brings tears to one’s eyes to smell them . . . and only very inexperienced young girls could appreciate them, or, perhaps, those wild ones in their forties. . . . That is the reason they are so deceitful,” he looked at Minka significantly, “ those wise, cold women who want to mimic love—who violate the passion—offering burning cinders for—for all that which they have not. . . . I assure you I should be taking my hat off every moment to see if it were not on fire, if I knew there was a gillyflower in it.”

“ Why you must be more nervous than any woman, Mr. Finsland,” laughed Minka. “ I will try among the gentle, meek flowers to find you one which will not set your imagination on fire.”

“ Don’t talk about imagination . . . illusion ! It is life itself, Miss Borvig,” he exclaimed passionately. “ The stronger we possess it the more intensely we live—the more gloriously and intoxicated with life do we buzz about in the sunshine, till—till . . . well, perhaps you can tell me—the soap bubbles around the great dark vacuum called nothingness. . . . ”

“And you, a poet, can say that? Now, at a time when one is almost in touch with the spirit world,” . . . she burst out with conviction. “We have, as you know, unmistakable answers from there.”

Finsland smiled sadly.

“The best answer we get regarding our existence is by speaking to a skull. It always gives the same truthful and clear answer: ‘Nil—dark vacuum.’ . . . No, the soap-bubble—that, too, is a belief. That is every one’s life-poem, every one’s conception of beauty. . . . And to be able to multiply it—to make it so dazzlingly beautiful and richly coloured for ourselves—so full of promises of happiness that we, foolish worms, can, at any rate for a moment, be jubilant. Yes, that is the problem. . . . That is to say, I fill the bubble first for myself and then for the others! And that is a deed which gives satisfaction!” he interposed satirically. “To let a gleam of sunlight into a semi-dark vacuum. . . . What are we but butterflies overtaken by the way—why not fly and flutter while we can?”

As he spoke, Minka gradually lapsed into a reverie—she saw a new world, in which this young man, who carried his head so well on his shoulders, showed her with so much sadness and so much knowledge—how everything lay in a beautiful, glittering, palish-golden sunset, with such a strange deathly fear at the transitoriness of it all.

How richly endowed he was with soul, how un-

happy he was with his profound views of life, his look so defiant, so satirical!

They were still deeply absorbed in conversation, when Berthea came sauntering towards them, her straw hat at the back of her head and a bold sailor-like air about her. She plucked a black currant here and a red currant there.

"Are you talking about spirits?" she asked curtly. "For when Minka is busy with spirits—she and Mr. Varberg, I mean—I always keep away."

She held up a bunch of ripe red currants.

"I only go in for eating, I do," she remarked displaying her large, irregular, white teeth as she munched away. "But Minka, she thinks she— —I say Minka," she whispered confidentially across the hedge, "I have just seen Mr. Varberg down on the road. He'll no doubt be impatient, when he asks for you and does not find you. Shall I send him down here?"

"Oh no, Berthea," said Minka with a suppressed laugh, evading the question, "he is not so very interesting after all."

Berthea began humming to herself, snatched some berries from the bushes and strolled up the path.

Directly afterwards she was seen at the garden gate hurrying down the road past the storehouse.

"Ah ha! Minka really thinks I shall always remain a child—while she"

She strolled along the road till she met Varberg.

“Do as I do, Mr. Varberg, for I have gone away and left them. . . . They have been doing nothing else the whole afternoon but discussing problems of life down the garden—Minka and a poet, called Finsland—Alvor Finsland. . . . Did you ever hear such a name?—Alvor! well perhaps it’s not so bad. He knocks all the spirit-business on the head—and Minka will soon be converted—she is quite fascinated. . . . I was not wanted at all. . . . But you try now, Mr. Varberg. If you can find it more entertaining with them, all right. Good-bye then, Mr. Varberg, I am going to look for father.”

She swung her hat round by the ribbon as she hurried off, then she looked back, put out her tongue at Varberg, giggling in great glee.

Varberg entered at the upper end of the garden, and began prodding the flower-beds with his stick, as he walked slowly along expecting Minka would come towards him.

There was no doubt that she saw him better from where she was than he could see her; but her head was all the time turned away.

“Here, Mr. Varberg—will you have some morellas? . . .” exclaimed Massy running towards him. Arnt and I have been gathering cherries for mother ever since dinner. Endre has come home you know and then there is a poet here. . . .

They are all down there. . . . He is going to stay with the road inspector this year, and write poetry, all about the river—about our river," she enlightened him.

Varberg's face became serious. He stood a moment in uncertainty before he strolled down to them and was introduced.

Schulteiss, whom he could not tolerate, had also put in an appearance, and was talking to Endre.

Minka greeted him in an extremely friendly manner, as an old acquaintance, and smiled, showing her pretty, white teeth ; but her attention was wholly taken up with the conversation. Endre received him most affably, while the poet only had a slight nod for him, being busily engaged in entertaining Minka.

"And then—above all, Miss Borvig—it is not beautiful," said Finsland passionately, "this belief in spiritualism is not beautiful. . . . Life becomes burdened with something shadowless, colourless, terrifying—something not quite dead—a corpse which is not completely dead, only half so. . . . Instead of the final end, something slimy, clammy with the breath of the sepulchre. When a Cæsar, Homer, Shakspeare, Goethe or a Byron dies, he must henceforth crawl about our legs at night like a cold toad."

"Yes, yes, yes!" ejaculated Schulteiss much pleased. "And then all sorts of necromancers and spiritual quacks are supposed to have permission to

pull the bellrope and make them appear—Napoleon and Hannibal, and Frederick the Great, and Dante, and Virgil— —don't you think, Mr. Poet Finsland, this might be just the hell to which they are condemned—their purgatory ? ”

“ Ugly, ugly, the whole thing is ugly ! ” grinned Finsland. “ No superior personality would risk anything—would expose his breast to the sword, to be reduced to a flitting, sighing spectre to frighten children and country folk.”

“ If the matter is to be judged from the point of beauty, then—” remarked Varberg satirically ; “ I thought the scientific experience regarding facts——”

“ If we are to judge by experience,” snarled Schulteiss from among the bushes, “ it is most extraordinary and remarkable that a spirit has never yet taken money out of bank-safes. It would be so convenient for cashiers, who had got into trouble—ha, ha, ha !—to direct attention to mediums—we should be modernising our witch trials of old.”

“ A man like Flammarion—astronomer—a man of science—whose competence can scarcely be disputed,” continued Varberg unperturbed, “ his ‘ Inhabited Worlds ’”

“ Of course, of course, Mr. Varberg, we know it,” snapped Schulteiss ; “ those inhabited worlds where, after death, we are preferred from sphere to sphere just as you promote a skipper to larger and larger vessels.”

“And I am of opinion, the smaller the mind the more spirits!” said Finsland decisively, with an air of superiority.

“Certainly, one may scoff and be witty over what is best and highest. It is so cheap, Mr. Poet Finsland—particularly when imagination is one’s strong point,” retorted Varberg coldly. He gave Minka a hurried glance: she knew that look so well; *if* she only dared to

“So cheap, so cheap,” gasped Schulteiss in his eagerness. “Let me tell you,” he said with half-closed eyes and a grimace of contempt; “the founders of religion have always been people of intellect. They have never debased the hope of immortality, never preached a mere common repetition the skipper promotions What they have intimated most profoundly has always been a complete change to something which the human mind cannot comprehend—somewhat similar to your so-called ‘fourth dimension’—if you like, Mr. Varberg, which our conceptions cannot grasp. And not only a fourth, but a fifth, a sixth, a seventh, and so on *ad infinitum*,” he cried. “It is something of this sort that Mahomet seems to have preached when he spoke of being transported into many heavens, and what St. Paul had in mind, when he says he saw and heard things which mankind had no language to express.”

“One can only believe what it is in one’s power

to believe," exclaimed the poet. "I believe that I am standing here eating the most excellent cherries with Miss Borvig. And what do you believe now, Miss Borvig?"

"About spirits? I think with you that on the whole they are not poetical And not particularly interesting either," she added defiantly, burying her head down among the bushes to reach a currant. "But they may exist for all that," she added timidly; she could feel and see Varberg's severe expression and threatening look.

"And something more, Minka," said Endre merrily, who had not followed the conversation and did not understand the situation. "When one must needs believe in such things, why not believe in one single, great spirit, in an Almighty God at once, instead of all these special spirits; otherwise we shall be on a level with the savages. Don't let this poetaster lead you into disbelief, I warn you."

"It appears to me, Mr. Endre," remarked Schulzeiss, rubbing his hands with satisfaction as they went towards the house for tea, "that Mr. Varberg has been properly sat upon to-day Eh?—He's our great popular philosopher in the district, you know . . . and you had him splendidly over those special spirits."

"I—I had Varberg? — — indeed I——"

"Ah, splendidly! You hit the nail on the head. Miss Minka could never have found a more convinc-

ing Shibboleth And as for your friend the poet, I bow with all respect to him. When one observes these contrasts— —eh, hey!— —the popular philosopher and then this man of intellect just like a mountain and a vacuum—like a mountain and a vacuum.”

During the evening Minka felt that Varberg's eyes became colder and colder, and more threatening. Cold beads of perspiration stood upon her brow, as dog-like she humbled herself to his will and wishes, and exerted herself to converse amiably with him and show herself particularly attentive. She was seized with a kind of panic—was in a living dread of this silent, severe face which chastised and domineered over her to the very roots of her nerves.

Oh, this terrible, sombre mysticism, which had seized hold of her overwrought imagination, all these visions in the dark in which she had become subdued and confined! To-day she had seen the trap-door of the cellar standing open, in the darkness of which a sunbeam was basking and playing with all the wild joy of day, quite regardless of everything between the heaven and earth.

She sat at the piano, her finger-tips on fire, accompanying Endre while he sang.

While he was in the midst of one of his bravuras Varberg came and stood close beside her.

“May I trouble you, Miss Borvig, to get me the

book you have been good enough to put aside for me?" he uttered curtly when the song ended. His voice was like the sound of a cold, rasping sword-blade. Minka ran upstairs, searched for the key of her chest of drawers, and brought down the cloth-bound volume, with his notes on spiritualism.

She saw him on the steps in the semi-darkness with hat and coat on, ready to go.

"But, Mr. Varberg, why are you leaving me like this?" she asked anxiously.

"You ask that, Minka? After having dared with laughter and scorn to betray all that which has spiritually bound us together."

"But, dear me, if I had known you objected the least bit to our laughter!"

"To *our* laughter! . . . the poet and Miss Minka; it has come to '*our*' now . . . the partners in a firm . . ."

He walked along the road without taking any notice of her; then suddenly stopped, and she felt his hand resting heavily on her shoulder.

"And you dared—dared to do it!"

He stared down into her eyes, fixedly . . . crushingly . . . with the quiet, self-confident smile which always succeeded in paralysing her will.

In her heated imagination he began to assume the form of a green-eyed tiger.

His hand pressed heavier and heavier upon her

. . . . it seemed as if he wanted to force her down on her knees.

She smiled, looking steadily at him—knew that she could satisfy his vanity—retain him as her admirer, if she would now really humble herself—again let him feel his unlimited power over her.

She felt him softly stroking her temple with his other hand. How easy, what a relief it would be, to give in! But to-night the spirit of revolt came over her, like a sudden gust of wind, and she roused herself with an effort.

“Of course! of course!” she exclaimed. “I must not, of course, forget to obey when you pull the bell-rope.”

“The bell-rope! Is that to be the name for our spiritual communication, the magnetic connection between us?”

“For your selfishness and your tyranny!” she burst out.

“Minka!”

“I said the bell-rope, and I meant the bell-rope!”

“Take care! I am afraid your tongue will be cutting the cord, whatever it may be.”

“I will not be treated like a thing without a will of my own!” she shouted. “I will not, I will not!”

“Without a will of your own! Ah! As if I cannot see with half-an eye what my good lady really wants—to get her liberty, to hum and buzz

round about this new light, the poet. Only a will-o'-the-wisp, to be sure. . . ."

Minka felt herself again under the influence of his angry, threatening look. It held her fast, and she felt her power of resistance beginning to forsake her. He stood with a gruesome smile, like one who watches the sufferings of the animal he is torturing; and he said with pale scorn:

"You may succeed in becoming indifferent to me, but you will never be released from my will."

The spirit of revolt again rose within her, her lips became contracted, and she writhed as if in intense pain.

"Oh, that I had never known you!" she screamed, quite beside herself, tearing herself loose and running a few steps, as if to flee from him.

Varberg laughed maliciously. . . .

"Be sure, be sure that you are a bird in my hand, wherever you fly. . . ."

He lifted his hat high, bowed, smiled sardonically, and walked rapidly away.

Minka stared after him, quite dazed, till he, without having once looked round, vanished down the hill.

Thor, the farm dog, barked and yelped and gave vent to all sorts of expressions of joy when Kjel made it jump over his stick and over himself, as he hurried up to the door. There he met Massy, seized

her round the waist, and pitched her in front of him into the sitting-room.

“You here, Mr. Finsland? Good evening. . . . Already ferreted out Endre? The nose of a poet is a fine one. . . . But as far as that goes, we have all got fine noses here in the parish. — — By Jove, he must get up early who thinks he can take us in! He, he, he! Ingenuity, you see, my lord poet, is many-sided. . . . There are some ingenious people who don’t write verses at all. . . . Well, Minka, play us something jolly, and Schulteiss and I will dance. No; try something serious, and Endre will sing something worth hearing. . . . You should have seen him play Hamlet this morning, my lord poet. By Jove, it was enough to inspire any one! Just fancy a prosaic fellow like myself—a regular yokel in that respect—it impressed me to such an extent, that — — — By-the-by, mother, I suppose you haven’t got a drop of brandy—though I’ve had sufficient of all sorts to-day. But, without beating about the bush, I just want an innocent little glass now—or perhaps as much as would make a glass of toddy, to soothe my nerves with. . . . Been feasting, you see, the whole day at different places, on account of the bank director. . . . It tells upon one. . . . I’ll go with you, mother. It’s the sacred bottle, to which father treats one, that I want to squeeze a drop out of.”

Mrs. Borvig understood that her son wanted to

unbosom himself. Since the morning, when the telegram had come and she had heard him mention the bank director and seen him rush off, she had felt very uneasy, and at times so anxious that she could hardly breathe. The words "bank director, bank director," had been ringing in her ears the whole of the day.

As soon as they got out into the pantry, Kjel gave a leap in the air. His mother noticed how pale he was, but he seemed in such good spirits that he could hardly contain himself.

"I say, mother, it was a regular battle the worst I've had in my life, anyhow. But then, I have won, you see. . . . It's time enough to boast of it to-morrow ; to-night I'll take a rest. . . . I've got him—the bank director, you understand. Don't say a word about it—but now I've got him in my hand — — This man is solvent—that one is unsafe—signed Kjel Borvig—such a dash, you know! And if at any time I underline a name in this way"—here he made a sweep with his hand—"it means he must be on his guard. . . . Ugh! Let me have a drop of brandy neat first. I need it, by Jove this son of yours, mother, deserves some sympathy. But just now he's knocked up—quite knocked up ; otherwise perfectly satisfied, mother," he laughed.

Mrs. Borvig looked into her son's face, which bore traces of the day's fêting. His tongue failed him often as he went on talking to his mother.

“ Ah, that has done me good ! It gives the finishing touch to a multiplicity of questionable glasses and toasts, mother— —I would not have you mixed up in such business for anything the world is not very good, mother I shall be director of the savings bank before Christmas. . . . But I’m not going to tell you how I’ve paved the way to it, not on any account.—Well, there is nothing criminal about it, you understand. But you see there are so many things,” here he twitched his nose and sniffed the air, “ which are not quite in accordance with what is called virtue, not exactly superfinely honourable.—Well, you see—to tell you plainly, mother—but you must not say anything to father about it. You promise me that. I think I kept my countenance pretty well, but that telegram came just at a time when the devil himself could not have thought of anything worse, even if he’d been paid for it. . . . I thought at once that the bank director had heard something or other in town from some good friend.— — —And then I had to have 3700 crowns by me—it was no use meeting him unless I had the bank had my acknowledgment that the money from the forest syndicate had been paid in, and I should have remitted it. But then, you know, the one hand must often wash the other clean in such a business as mine, wages and instalments and such like . . . 3700 crowns on the spot !—or else—yes, it is that ‘ *or else*,’ you

understand. If that fellow only had as much as a grain of suspicion he would begin clearing up the ground here in such a way that there would not be many left on their legs. There was no help for it, so I set off to Simonsen's—drove like fury. . . . Three thousand seven hundred crowns, Simonsen, for eight days—till I have been in town—I give you transfers for the whole stock of deals on hand. Ugh! It was a close shave, but I managed it.—And then home like a shot— —The most polite of hosts—Thekla, dressed for the occasion, the most dignified and imposing of hostesses, and besides a relation of his, you know. . . . But afterwards, when we got into the study, I began like an angry wolf to grumble about the interest—till at last he became red as a turkey cock, and said he had never in his life had such a rubbing. I made quite an impression upon him. . . . 'I don't know what others may think of you, but you will do for me,' said the director, 'you will be a rich man.'"

Mrs. Borvig was painfully affected; she poured the hot water into her son's glass till it overflowed.

"Is it you, or I, mother, who is not quite right in our balance to-night," he drawled, "a little bit unsteady, eh? You must empty some of that water—about half-and-half—that'll just do."

He took the glass of toddy and tasted it, as he went into the other room.

Mrs. Borvig remained behind in the larder resting against the dresser, rocking herself uneasily to and fro and breathing with difficulty.

This seemed to be very much like what they call swindling.

She clenched and wrung her hands. Poor, poor boy, you have already got far beyond where your mother can help you.

The dim twilight of the July evening fell on her disturbed, agitated face.

Light, hurried steps were heard outside, and Berthea put her head in through the door of the larder.

"Mr. Varberg is gone already, mother! I think he had enough of it—of being only so much air. Minka is now quite taken up by Mr. Finsland," she went on, anxious to tell the news, "only Mr. Finsland. She did not even notice Mr. Varberg for this poet! Minka and he are soaring high above us. And she is quite enraptured with those remarkable verses of his, which Endre sang. Mr. Varberg went away directly afterwards."

Mrs. Borvig's face darkened during her daughter's tittle-tattle, which became more and more unendurable to her.

At this moment her cup of bitterness flowed over, a look of impatience and despair came into her face, and swift as lightning she dealt Berthea a sharp ringing box on the ear.

"It's both wicked and mean of you!" she exclaimed as she followed it up with another. "This will soon be a nice house!—What evil can have befallen it?" she went on, in a loud quivering voice, while her daughter crouched down by the door, crying and glancing, terrified, at her mother, who stood trembling with excitement.

"Whatever I do, and wherever I look, it seems as if misfortune is sure to follow. But I tell you—both you and Minka and Endre and Kjel—that if you can so easily forget you have a mother who does not know what good she can do for you—who does nothing but think and worry about you day and night, you may find that some fine day I shall take leave of you.—Do as you like!—go, go—out of this house!— —I have Arnt and Massy still left!"

"But mother, mother!" bellowed Berthea.

"You are not my children! What does Minka, what do you, and Endre, and Kjel care for me, when there is anything you take a fancy to? If only I could leave off caring for you all!"

She sank down on a chair, hid her face in her hands, and sobbed violently.

VII

GRANDFATHER Borvig was very much in demand. He had to call on the little one down by the mill as often as he possibly could, and if he was pressed for time, they would hold up the child to him at the window as he drove hurriedly past in his kariol.

He showed a great weakness for baby Baard; the boy was to be called Baard after him. And Baard Kjelsen Borvig looked quite a sensible baby as he lay in his cradle.

But to be his doctor—no, thank you. Better go to the new doctor, Mr. Stenvig; he is a specialist for children, and has studied both at home and abroad.

Grandfather Borvig held his head aloft with a certain amount of pride when he made his usual *détour* round by the mill, and drove right through the whirr and the burr of the machinery, and then along the timber yard with the stacks of deals, and past Kjel's new house, built in Swiss style, with zinc roof and large windows It really seemed as if Kjel had now succeeded in making his business a lucrative one. He undoubtedly began to occupy an important position in the district, which enabled him,

with his inborn business talent, to get all the custom and timber business to sift through his mill, as he expressed it. . . . It was not altogether unlikely either that Kjel might become director in the savings bank. It was talked about in many quarters how the voting would turn out The doctor had heard little birds singing about it in more than one place.

Kjel preserved his firm sound common sense ; he did not allow himself to be entrapped in any of the speculations of the day. He was quite proof against new ideas—whatever he otherwise might say to please his strictly ideal, theorising better-half

“ Little Beard is all right again, Bente,” reported the doctor, when he returned home, and was taking off his fur coat and top boots ; “ spasms of that sort go just as suddenly as they come I spoke to Dr. Stenvig down the road ; he had just left there, and everything was all right He gives Thekla regular lectures, you know,” he said winking, “ so, just now, it is like a college for the treatment of infants over there Discussions as to why the stomach is out of order, and why it is sure to come right again. Thekla, you know, likes to go to the bottom of everything ; and the doctor gives as many explanations as he can think of, if she will only take them for granted.”

“ Here is an invitation to you from Rognerud for a game of whist to-night. Kjel is also invited,” said his wife ; “ but I think you should stick to your old,

accustomed circle of friends, Borvig, and not allow yourself to be dragged away from it. All this party-going of Kjel's round the parish, with cards and toddy, is not for us."

"Well, I can't say I care much to sit and play cards and be boon-companion to my own son and be treated to all sorts of witticisms. But one must, of course, do something to back the lad up, you see."

"I rather think it is time we gave up mixing with these people You are a doctor, Borvig. The honour and esteem you enjoy you have paid for with the honest, hard work of a life-time. No one shall take that from you, neither in misfortune nor sorrow!" she exclaimed, greatly agitated. "Our house shall be *our* house—the one we have built in the face of God and man! And Kjel's house shall be Kjel's. We can borrow no honour or benefit from them, if they build ever so high!"

"What is the matter with you, Bente? I shall soon begin to think you can't tolerate Thekla either. As for Kjel, I know he is once for all excommunicated," he muttered dejectedly. "Of course, she is a little conceited," he resumed in a conciliatory tone. "Something of the grandiose style about her, when she comes sweeping into the room But you are not the one to let yourself be swept on one side so easily, either."

Mrs. Borvig looked at him with a strange expression.

"We will rest satisfied with our own old-fashioned, worn silver, stamped with Baard Borvig's name. Our house does not rest on Kjel's lofty speculations. It rests, and *shall* rest, on you and me!"

"How seriously you take things, Bente. It seems as if you never want to hear about Kjel! By the way, I think he might soon begin and pay me back a little," the doctor opined.

"Don't ask him for it, Borvig; it might happen to be more inconvenient for him at the moment than he would care to own. And thank God, I had nearly said—we have no more money to help him with, if he should want any."

"Oh, not at all, it seems he can help himself now."

The doctor walked away whistling to himself.

Thekla considered her duties as a mother anything but easy to fulfil. She was always anxious to make clear to herself any new phase of life upon which she had entered. She generally made a study of things. But an infant's life was so full of complications that one's reason often came to a standstill. And then a messenger would be sent for Dr. Stenvig.

She stood so much in need of, longed so much for his enlightening explanations. He had such a remarkable ability for entering logically into a question. And when, nevertheless, anything remained enigmatical, the young doctor, in his free

and easy way, so devoid of the superior air of the man of authority, knew so well how to elucidate the various scientific views on the subject in order that she might see and judge for herself.

His theories about the treatment of infants were a complete protest against the old-fashioned method of swathing the child—a method which checked the functions of the skin and prevented the body from coming into contact with the air—a complete revolt against old usages and customs. . . . His views were undoubtedly those of the most advanced man she had met since her happy days in town. He was in fact a combination of the teacher and the doctor. . . . And like a secret conspirator she enjoyed his sceptical look and smile at the prevailing customs regarding the treatment of infants.

Her first and foremost principle was that one must above all preserve oneself as a human being, and be such to one's children and in one's home. This was the principal reason why she surrendered her child to the cares of the wet nurse ; it prevented any disturbance at night, &c.

Mrs. Kjel, Minka, and Finsland, after drinking their coffee, had settled down in the sitting-room, at Elvsæt.

Thekla felt that something like a breath from the outside world now pervaded the house since Mr. Finsland, the poet, had become a frequent visitor.

Mr. Varberg, that sombre spectre of the night, had only darkened the place with his presence.

The relations between him and Minka, with the frequent misunderstandings, petty quarrels and consequent state of high tension, seemed mysterious enough. But one thing was certain—Minka had for the present a rage for poetry and not for spirits. . . .

It was difficult for any one to say whether she preferred the poet or the engineer, for both came constantly to the house, and faithfully abused one another to her. But she seemed in a way to extend her favours to both.

Thekla had taken it into her head this afternoon to get to the bottom of the real principles of Finsland's poetry by dint of many searching questions, both direct and indirect.

Finsland parried and avoided them ; he was apparently quite absorbed with Minka.

"I was just thinking," exclaimed Thekla with warmth, "what an immeasurable amount of good a man, with the gift of language, like you, could do— if you would take up some question of reform, would let yourself be moved by the distress of mankind . . . for, I suppose, you do not call yourself an intellectual hot-house flower," she concluded sarcastically.

"My flower is called discontent—transitoriness—
despair . . . perhaps some one or other who sees

it and inhales its perfume may be inspired to take up the work."

"You should speak to Dr. Stenvig, Mr. Finsland," said Thekla, authoritatively. "He is a man with wide sympathies, who has thoroughly thought out and sifted the questions of the day. . . . He will open your eyes."

"And let myself be deposited in a dried state in a medicine chest, like a beneficial herb for children's powders," added Finsland.

Minka laughed, showing her white teeth; she had long ago entered into Finsland's spirit and way of looking at things.

"Society cries out and calls aloud for help, I can assure you," said Thekla eagerly.

"Well, madam, I am myself one of those who cry out. Some will have food, others will have beauty; I feed them and myself, as well as I can—I hunger and I sing. . . . But what useful work are you engaged upon now, Miss Borvig?" he asked wantonly. "I will tell you . . . exactly the same as the poem . . . you exist.—So abundantly rich in colour—a harmony in brown—it colours everything wherever you go. You powder one brown as with flower dust, far into one's soul and memory; one thinks in brown, dreams in brown — — At present I only blow brown soap bubbles," he exclaimed.

Thekla looked somewhat troubled at the mention of soap bubbles.

"One moment, madam," cried Finsland. "There are those who take their colour and luxuriance from the crevices of a decaying community. . . . They sing the song of corruption, while the sun yields to the night and dies away on the walls."

"Mankind is in distress, Mr. Finsland. As long as there is such an overwhelming number of problems for everybody, beauty must really be satisfied to stand a little in the background—and wait."

"I beg your pardon—beauty is in the vanguard! Just as the banners are in front of the regiment—high up in the air—like a longing awakened . . . a new and more beautiful time cannot arrive until some one gets people to long for it."

"I thought it was dire necessity which brought that about."

"I thought it was the people with imagination, poets and artists, who had the ability to show us something better."

Thekla appeared somewhat perplexed, but prepared for a retort.

The sound of sledge bells was suddenly heard, and she looked out of the window, then drew back her head again hastily, saying bitterly:

"A person with interests should never marry."

It was Kjel who arrived. He made a great noise in the hall while taking off his top boots, and came into the room quite flushed and red in the face.

"Devilish cold. . . . Had to give up the whist

after the coffee, over at Berg's ; the ladies from the parsonage arrived on a visit, so I thought I would drive up here and fetch you home, Thekla."

"Thank you, you know I prefer to walk down hill."

"But it was a happy thought of mine, you'll admit anyway, henny-penny."

Thekla, in trying to conceal her ill-humour, pursed her lips, and her face assumed a peaky expression not at all unlike that of a hen.

"What? Cross, Thekla dear, cross?" he exclaimed, going up to her. "Have I interrupted you in some lofty intellectual flight? At home I always decamp when you and Stenvig begin discussing these higher subjects. You know that, Thekla, don't you?"

Thekla remained silent, her two black eyes fixed intently on the ceiling.

"You're so confoundedly intolerant!" he began. "I deny most emphatically that your interests are an inch loftier than mine. They lie in another direction, that's the only difference."

He stood before her, with a patronising, critical expression, and jingled his bunch of keys.

"So business is not an art! Let us take an instance—Monitor and Merrimac on the Potomac river. That was quite a different drama to any of Schiller's or Goethe's. It changed naval warfare all over the world ; we have had to take to iron instead of

wood. . . . The prices of timber down at our saw-mill, in our very walls, would now be considerably higher but for that battle. If it had not taken place we two would perhaps have been"—here he cut himself short, and appeared to be going over some calculations in his mind. "Well, I'll say no more—only we should have been worth something like a couple of hundred thousand . . . and when I now think of some——"

"Berthea, dear, bring me a glass of water," said Thekla, who looked as if she were feeling qualmish.

"I have never heard that the art of making money belonged to classical arts," she muttered.

"I say, when I think of such a small matter, for instance, as that of getting all the business men in the district—whether they are conservative or belong to the opposition—under one hat—my hat, you understand. Each train-load will bring in gold! — — We will mature the timber ourselves, and export it direct, you know—avoid the town. . . . Well"—here he tapped his forehead with his forefinger—"that requires some talent, I should imagine."

"Most beautiful Minka," interrupted Finsland, "may I hold the skein of wool for you while you wind? . . . I cannot bear to see you using the back of a chair—I grudge it the honour, in fact."

Kjel sauntered carelessly out of the room, leaving the door half open.

“Never before in this world have I wished to be a skein-winder, for all eternity a skein-winder,” continued Finsland. “Here I am, sitting and watching for the least hint from under your eyelids—I am actually trembling lest they should open and look angrily at me. . . . And that,” he suddenly went on, as he caught sight of Varberg, “while the spirit-conjurer himself stands in the door, glaring at me, fixing his eyes upon me, as if he wanted to search one’s heart and marrow. . . . No; you need not wind the least bit quicker, Minka. . . . You might as well cut my thread of life as shorten the miserable five minutes of happiness I still have left.”

Minka did not venture to look up; she felt Varberg’s gaze resting upon her downcast eyelids.

When he was present this overwhelming, oppressing feeling of his power came over her, however much she thought she had freed herself from it. She knew she hated him—that she did not love him! But nevertheless she was in fear and trembling, lest she, in spite of all, was possessed by an irresistible attraction for him which she could not control. . . .

“Have you had any coffee, Mr. Varberg?” she inquired, flurriedly.

He smiled in his peculiar way.

“I came to propose a sledge-drive on the ice, Miss Minka. You know that I——”

He sat down behind Finsland and looked fixedly

at her, as he rocked himself backwards and forwards in the rocking-chair.

Minka turned pale and nervously went on winding.

“I believe men think we are always ready,” interposed Thekla, sharply. “Now, you, Mr. Varberg, want to drive, and off one must go!”

“Pardon me, madam, you misunderstood me. It was Miss Minka I addressed. . . . And you, Miss Minka, I ask with the right of an older friend—which you, no doubt, will acknowledge. . . .” He spoke imploringly, with a tender, fascinating look.

Minka knew the tone.

“I particularly wish you to take this drive with me. . . . And I may as well tell you the reason why I still persist with my request,” he said after a pause, as no answer came, — — “although it was my intention only to inform you of it when we were out on the ice. . . . I have suddenly been appointed the sectional-chief for the district north of this, and this afternoon is the only opportunity I shall have of saying farewell.”

He fixed his cold, bird-like, blinking eyes upon her.

Minka felt the moment for the inevitable decision had now arrived.

His look had its influence upon her after all, and she rose mechanically to follow him.

As she wound the last of the wool, she en-

countered Finsland's mocking expression, which, together with his suppressed laughter, had the effect of totally dispelling all mysticism.

She sat down again hurriedly.

"Thank you, I do not care to go out driving with you, this afternoon, Mr. Varberg;" she said, in a quivering voice, "I will say farewell now!" she cried, and rushed out of the room.

Varberg stood a moment as if he thought she might possibly return.

"Miss Borvig's highly emotional nature is subject to many changing influences," he said, sarcastically. "Well—I have to say good-bye to many pleasant hours in this house."

In the course of the winter Finsland returned to the capital.

Until now Minka had never understood Thekla when she complained how empty and devoid of interest the place was. How intellectually dead and lonely for a hungering soul in this apparently busy life among people who were always toiling and driving timber and planks, and talking about money and business in restless excitement—or among lady friends from the neighbouring families of the official and moneyed classes, who were only thinking of balls, and betrothals, and finery—or longed to go to America, when the question was raised about a girl becoming anything like independent nowadays.

. . . . They would not venture upon anything here at home.

Berthea was just one of them—gadding about and bent on pleasure wherever Kjel was invited, gossiping, and poking her nose into everybody's business—really thinking of nothing but falling in love—all frivolity and giddiness!

It was so deadly dull. Minka knew the paths and roads about the place so aggravatingly well, every stone, every ditch, every tree.

And to Schulteiss she confided in her bitter hours all her profound weariness of life.

To him she unbosomed herself—he had to sympathise with her sighs, and find words for what she suffered—how she went about without any outlet for her longings. . . . He had to read the letter she received from Finsland, to join in her enthusiasm, and see how she had cried over this or that part of it—and to guess and wonder as to what he could have meant about her by this phrase or that expression.

And Schulteiss would put his head on one side and wince and wriggle into saying "yes" or "no" according to the answer she might wish—he would decry what he, the moment before, had been expatiating upon and praising in eloquent words.

He had now become so humble and small—he had even to swallow her glowing enthusiasm for Finsland—was, so to speak, all eyes, full of anxiety

and suffering, which, in a glance swift as lightning divined her wishes.

Nobody but Schulteiss understood her. *That* sigh from Minka was his reward, his silent happiness. He only waited to hear it again, and, as he listened to it, his heart stood still. It thrilled him with a feeling of happiness, upon which he could live for days.

It seemed as if Kjel's success in business had put the doctor in a more liberal frame of mind, the outcome of which was that he even agreed, with a certain amount of sympathy, to Minka's idea of going up to town.

And after many deliberations and much hesitation, it was settled that she should go with the object of finishing her musical education. Miss Endreson, who had been her teacher for so many years, was, of course, a most able pianist—there was no question of that; but her name was no authority.

Then began a busy time with the cutting out and sewing for her outfit. A dressmaker was engaged, and every one in the house who could ply a needle was called upon to assist her.

Berthea's tongue worked busily.

“Minka has always had an easy time of it because she is such a bad hand at sewing— —but she has had nice dresses for all that, . . . this walk-

ing dress with the yellow revers—she intends to create a sensation in town, if I know her rightly. . . .”

In the meantime Minka was leaning over an open drawer up in her bedroom, reading for the twentieth time a poem which Finsland had sent her, entitled “Minka.”

She critically surveyed her much lauded “brown” beauty in the mirror, humming to herself, before she placed the paper in the drawer again.

On the landing she met Schulteiss; she looked at him with a mysterious smile as if occupied with some pleasant thought which she did not care to impart to him.

Endre had once remarked about Minka’s expression on such occasions that she seemed to take as much pleasure in herself as if she was enjoying a piece of sugar.

She took a delight in noticing how she had more and more succeeded in gaining Schulteiss’ ear, and how happily he smiled as she confidentially gazed into his eyes.

She was now taken up with the idea of realising life as a personality of womanly power, as Finsland had expressed it, to throw out sunlight and carry on her work through beauty.

“I am going up to town on Saturday, Mr. Schulteiss.”

“Ah, Miss Minka, I dare not think how dreary

and dark it will be here Oh God! to me the sun will have set when I know that you no longer tread these stairs, that your hand no longer touches this railing"

"Well," Mr. Schulteiss, "I shall never find any one to talk with like you—you with your fertile mind. And then you have always understood me, Mr. Schulteiss."

"Do you really think so, Miss Minka? I have noticed and taken a delight in every bud that has shot forth and blossomed in you. You have been my garden, my world of beauty. You have— —"

"You must remember that if I gain any success in the world, it is you who have equipped me for it. I want to follow the bent of my nature you see, Mr. Schulteiss. I want to live, to know that I inspire those who have the power and the ability to hoist the right sails and have the courage to use them. That is what I want. I say it to you and to no one else; I want to set out in the world as a female pirate!" she cried, knitting her fist coquettishly at him.

"I have told father and mother that I want to continue my musical studies. You see, one is always supposed to be studying or working at something. But what I want to do is to live and work as Minka Borvig—I do not mind what people say or think; their prejudices are so much straw to me. Perhaps," she went on with a mysterious smile, "you may

some fine day hear something about a concert or music-hall singer, whose name is Minka." Here she patted herself on the chest. "For father's and mother's sake we will not put Borvig to it. I only say—perhaps. One must first and foremost try to assert oneself, get to the front and be seen, if one is to do any good.— —And then, and then," she burst out showing her enchanting white teeth, "then comes Minka's history—her life—life—life, Mr. Schulteiss! She is not going to spoil her life by getting married—like Thekla down at the mill."

Schulteiss stood despondent; he began guardedly:

"You know, of course, there is no one who respects, values, and appreciates your great courage and independence as I do, or who believes in your innate right, so to speak, to attain the highest and rarest distinction . . . you are that successful work of nature which can compel universal admiration But as I warned you, in spite of your misjudgment of my motives, warned you against Mr. Varberg's illusory fascinations allow me to appeal to your profound and sound instinct with regard to the dazzling representations of a poet who is more—I must say it—more conceited than renowned."

"I knew it I could see it was coming You are so envious that you make yourself quite objectionable."

"That gentleman's profession is to set up *Fata Morganas*," Schulteiss declared passionately in a loud

voice. "Like all the less gifted poets he confounds realism with idealism—in fact, I may say he eats, drinks, and declaims in a lofty, grandiloquent manner and writes verses in a low, often quite hackneyed style. . . . Yours is an ideal nature, Miss Minka. You are possessed with the great gift of appreciating a soul's grandeur. I beseech you, I beseech you!" he cried, "Oh, Miss Minká, you who in your beauty possess reality, you who yourself are a richly coloured pulsating poem, what have you to do with the castles in the air conjured up by such an ordinary person?"

"Ugh! Mr. Schulteiss! You always talk so malignantly of any one who understands me a little. You seem to think no one must understand me but yourself And now when I am so much in need of support and encouragement and cheering words I shall never forget it; just as I have confided everything to you, you cannot even control your petty jealousy, but must vent your venom on the poem Mr. Finsland has written me. Yes, for it is that which is troubling you—I wish I had never shown it you"

"Minka—Miss Minka!" he burst out, "only let me lie outside your door like a watch-dog! I will lick the hands of your friends, even if it should kill me."

"It always pains me when you talk and go on like this, Mr. Schulteiss. You make it quite

impossible to speak to you about anything. . . .
But now I must hurry downstairs and try on my walking-dress. Quite in the height of fashion, as you may imagine. . . . You shall see me in it this afternoon when it is ready.— — Then you will see what I shall look like when I am in town," she said, smiling at him.

VIII

IN the spring, when the melting snow flooded the river, Lars the ferryman found plenty to do. All at once he would be called upon to ferry across a kariol, or a gig, or a carriage ; or he would be hailed from the opposite side by people of the district—by business men, from John Vaaler, the most important of them, who was now building some large planing works, down to the timber-floating superintendents.

And then the vehicles would rattle along the wet muddy roads, with the slush dripping from the wheels, till they turned in at the gate of one or other of the houses for an afternoon whist or an evening boston party.

And late at night Lars the ferryman was again in requisition. There they stood, two or three at a time, on the bank of the river hallooing, and there was often very little peace for him till one or two in the morning.

It was a busy time in the district ; there was great excitement in view of the approaching general

meeting of the savings bank on Saturday the sixteenth of June.

It was no secret that there was an agitation on foot to turn out the old board of directors. During the last two or three years there had been more and more speculations, principally due to Kjel's influence in turning the forests to account—the manufacture of wood-pulp, the building of saw-mills, planing works, etc.

It was quite time the new generation took up arms against the old. The principal object was to inspire the directors of the savings bank with confidence in their business, and thereby make it easier to obtain loans and advances of money.

During this time Kjel kept himself conscientiously away from all the boston and whist parties outside his own house. He lounged about among his stacks of deals and planks—he would not be accused of taking any part in the agitation.

Now and then a vehicle would stop outside his door. Sometimes it was a friend who came to give a report about the voting; it might be some one who thought this a convenient time to obtain Kjel's recommendation for stability, in order to secure a loan in one of the banks in town.

And Kjel was not inexorable, although he generally required a good deal of pressing. A regret expressed with sufficient indignation that it was so very difficult for a business

man to obtain loans in the district's own savings bank generally settled the matter; and Kjel's recommendation on such occasions was as good as a vote in his own favour. It might also happen that Kjel on suitable occasions would in return ask a slight favour in connection with a bill which had suddenly come upon him. He had on the whole a great number of names at his disposal among those clients whose credit outside the district he upheld by his recommendations. "It's the simplest thing in the world," he would say in his cordial, almost brutal way; "if you back me, I'll back you amongst my friends in town."

To-day Kjel was strolling about between his office and his stacks of deals, while in the sitting-room Dr. Stenvig was as usual holding forth on some subject or other.

If there was anything which could induce Kjel to break through his voluntary retirement and have his horse put in, it was when this young coxcomb of a doctor called, and together with Thekla began to reform humanity from its very cradle. No end to this confounded talk about development. . . . Thekla would pace up and down, nervous and expectant, and in quite a bad humour if the doctor did not call there on his way to or from his patients.

At last he was going . . . and Thekla came to the door with him.

“ Adieu, adieu,” grinned Kjel.

Strange to say, as soon as the doctor's kariol was out of sight, she set out up the hill to Elvsæt.

Kjel strolled leisurely after her.

As soon as they had entered the sitting-room, and Thekla had comfortably seated herself, she began :

“ I have come here on an errand to you, Mrs. Borvig, with reference to a general appeal from the wives and mothers of the district to Dr. Stenvig to give some lectures at the parish hall on the hygiene and management of children. A reform is greatly needed. . . . Those who have once gone into the matter and seen how wrong the present treatment of infants is, can only look upon it as inhuman ; the present state of things is indefensible. We must begin in this district to take up social questions at some time or another. . . . I now want to ask Mrs. Bente Borvig to place her name first on the list, of course, so that the subject can be properly discussed at once.”

“ You must really excuse me, Thekla—won't you take your hat off? But I have had children of my own and have also some idea of what my husband from his long experience thinks on the subject. I cannot say that I quite agree with all Mr. Stenvig's new theories ; they seem to me to come from a man fresh from his books—at least what I have heard of them. And so you will understand that I am

not exactly the right person to approach in the matter."

"I must say," burst in Kjel, "I must say, that that fellow that doctor in fact I am perfectly astonished for it is so confoundedly impudent—not to say bare-faced—to want to advertise himself in the district from the very house of his colleague, his rival. . . . It would be exactly the same if I asked the wife of the savings bank director to lend her name to a meeting got up in opposition to her husband. It's all humbug! Self-advertisement! Pshaw! You can see it yourself, Thekla. . . ."

"Yes, what I see is—sawdust—and sawdust—and nothing but sawdust no breathing space for any of the questions of the day!" exclaimed Thekla rather warmly.

"No, no, just listen Thekla—can't you listen?—I only mean that he avails himself of your knowledge of the higher subjects—yes, for Thekla is a woman of great intelligence, mother. . . . And when I become rich you shall not want means for carrying out your ideas. I tell you, Thekla, you shall have me and no one else to thank that you are not left pent up in a suffocating room with your ideas on Saturday night the sixteenth I am bank director, as sure as——"

Mrs. Borvig gave a start.

"As sure as I live, mother. — — And considering

I think of nothing else but of building up a golden throne for you, Thekla, and of placing you upon it, I think you might have a little respect for what is mine," he said with much emotion as he left the room.

A hard look came into Mrs. Borvig's face as she stopped Thekla, who was tying her hat strings and preparing to go.

"One moment, Thekla, since you are here; just sit down a bit and listen to me. I only want to warn you you mustn't be offended."

Thekla looked surprised and irritated, partly guessing what was coming.

"There are things one shrinks from saying and one would rather put off as long as possible. But I think there is no one who can say this to you so clearly as I, without running the risk of being misunderstood. It is about Stenvig."

"I thought as much!"

"I must tell you plainly I have noticed so many significant smiles, and have heard so many words dropped here and there, that I feel I ought to tell you of it."

Thekla eyed Mrs. Borvig up and down once or twice, with a surprised inquiring look—this sort of thing—from her!

"I care nothing for what it pleases people to say or think about me. A friendship which rests on many strong interests, as mine and Stenvig's, cannot pay

any attention to parish gossip. . . . Every intellectual relationship between man and woman must still be prepared to be misjudged—I say still, Mrs. Borvig, as long as there are so many who look upon everything connected with a more highly developed modern life with the obscure notions of ordinary people . . . but I hardly expected it would begin here. . . .”

“Well, I consider that a wife ought, both for her husband’s and her own sake, to be careful also about appearances.”

“I do not think so. And if this is any errand of Kjel’s, I can only say I decline all interference—pray excuse me if I speak out so plainly.”

“Kjel has nothing whatever to do with what I am telling you, I can assure you. But when I warn you it is because I find that these ordinary people, as you call us, are not altogether wrong.”

“What do you mean, Mrs. Borvig?”

“I will tell you. When a wife’s heart and joy, her sympathy, as well as her intellectual interests, are not with her husband, but with another—then all healthy-minded people feel there is something wrong, although there may not be even a shadow of what we, in every-day language, call faithlessness. The worst part of it is, that the man is cheated out of that which is most essential to him—that which is the kernel in their relationship—and is left only with the husk. It is that which one feels in a case like this, Thekla—if I also am to speak plainly.”

“Have I, then, no human rights? Why, any one can see how void of interest, how totally without comprehension, Kjel is to everything except business, that he cannot possibly enter into my life.”

“Why did you take him, then, Thekla, when you knew so well that his happiness could never become yours?”

“We will not lose ourselves in the laws of the eternal struggle for existence, Mrs. Borvig. — — But the meaning of it all is this, then,” she said, throwing back her head—“that I must not even have permission to cultivate my intellectual interests. I must die in all this sawdust. — — To speak out quite clearly, I intend, as far as I am concerned, to trample under foot all these narrow-minded considerations — — to acknowledge no law—none—except my own free self-respect. . . . Well, I suppose I shall have to accept Mrs. Borvig’s refusal to my application,” she said, rising to go.

The candle was flickering again to-night upstairs in the yellow room. . . . After a while it was placed on the edge of the long painted table, where it burnt steadily.

Since Mrs. Borvig had spoken to her daughter-in-law her mind had become filled with anxiety and restlessness. . . . She had not been able to battle against the current—had not been able to stem Kjel’s lofty admiration for Thekla, although she had seen

just as clearly then as now, how little the two were suited for one another, whither they would drift, and how unhappy this union would be. It seemed as if Kjel's tendency for wild speculations had developed into a kind of mania for possessing everything which lay beyond his reach—whether it were something ideal or financial speculations. His own personal happiness, poor fellow, was irretrievably lost. It had become a complete subjection, which would be continued and continued under Thekla's method of theorising. . . . This fraud, this fatal mistake, he would suffer for to the bitter end.

But that which, so to speak, had stifled this—had rested over her the whole day as an ever-growing, terrible calamity that threatened the family—was Kjel's confident assertion that he would be elected director of the savings bank.

It came upon her like a clap of thunder.

She could see it plainly. . . . The figures which now went into thousands would hereafter be written in tens of thousands. . . . would bubble and swell like a flood into hundreds of thousands. . . . The ruin, when it came, would be on quite a different scale—a boundless ocean of debts, with disaster and shame.

The name of Borvig would be cursed, would become notorious over the whole country! — —

She stood pale and motionless in front of the candle, her lips quivered now and then, as if speak-

ing or answering herself. She saw Kjel before her as the broad-shouldered active boy who had been the best snow-shoe runner and the best wrestler, and who had always got through his lessons so cleverly without learning them ; and now she beheld in him a wily, crafty man of business with a thick layer of good-natured, winning ways—a fat, morally dropsical person the first person he deceived, in the midst of all these artifices of which he was fully conscious, was himself. He worked himself into illusions till he became dizzy—dared only think that he was on the broad way to wealth—only barred by some obstacles, to overcome which was a joy and satisfaction, and tended to show what a clever head he had. . . . She had watched and noticed how his face had changed in the course of years—his eyes had acquired this quick, shrewd, anxious expression.

He had been at one time just as simple and straightforward as Massy, who was lying in there asleep, relying so trustfully upon father and mother and all of them—except upon Berthea—and who was always wondering about Minka and asking after her.

It was enough to bring one to weep tears of blood — — Borvig, Borvig, poor Borvig !

But it must not happen—Kjel must not get the savings bank into his hands to trifle with. It must not happen, even if she had to shout aloud that he was insolvent,

The unfortunate part of it was that Kjel had got old Arne Bergersen, whom every one knew to be prudence itself, to join him at the time in this forest syndicate of his. . . . It was on the strength of that name that Kjel had allured the other speculators into the venture, and thereby raised himself at once to the position of chief and manager of an important business in the district, and was able to start these new and untried undertakings.

An idea dawned upon her.

She sat thinking and pondering, and watching the flickering candle while the stearine melted and ran down its sides.

The cautious old Arne Bergersen was no doubt one of the two or three in the parish whose vote would decide the general election.

What if she went and confided to him how unhappy she would be if Kjel was elected director? —

The reason — — —.

She would not give any, except that she considered him quite unfit for the post, that it would simply be a misfortune for him.

“It can't be helped, Kjel,” she mumbled to herself, her face rigid and cold. “It is treachery. But it will soon come to this, that I shall be obliged to kill my own children — — and,”—here she raised her hand threateningly, the shadow showing on the wall, “—did I not know that you were already

insolvent—that the disgrace is already there I would run down on the main road, and cry out that all must be on their guard against my son Kjel, the swindler.”

Berthea had just before Christmas broken off her engagement with a Mr. Valentinsen, of the Customs, and was now secretly engaged to the handsome Mr. Schiölberg, in the county judge's office.

She generally kept her circle of special friends and acquaintances quite apart from her relations. There was nothing that happened in the district that did not interest her—engagements, marriages, family troubles and quarrels; and she knew quite well how the agitation for or against Kjel went on, and all the gossip in the parish on that subject.

Through a friend of hers, Anna Lund, she had received quite different accounts both about Endre, who was busy studying King Lear, Hamlet, and other great character parts, and about Minka, than what appeared in the letters they sent home.

They seemed to be quite infatuated with Minka in town. She associated with Finsland and poets and artists, both early and late—some were to paint her portrait, and others to write verses to her. “They find her so mysterious and interesting,” wrote Anna “and they are always going to theatres and music-halls.”

But not a word was breathed about all this in their own letters.

And Schulteiss was always about, rummaging and prying among the letters for everything Minka wrote. He had to content himself now with confiding in Berthea.

"You see, Berthea," he would say mysteriously, "your sister is no negative or destructive personality. She is something positive—a source of strength. Everything that comes under the spell of her magnetic touch becomes imbued with life and sentiment, with fulness and energy—hem!—a perfect contrast to Mrs. Kjel down at the mill. . . . Formerly she was influenced by others—now she rises to unfold her strength. . . . Now she soars above them all, higher and higher, according to the nature inherent in her. . . . Now it is she who sets the powers of others in motion, giving the keynote to all sides, as on a piano. She does not give herself up to any one—she only inspires, causing them all to vibrate, to become full-toned, each according to his nature. — — It is her high calling—I know it—from herself. . . . But she does not give herself up to any one, that is the point—the important part of it. . . . Isn't that so, Miss Berthea?" he suddenly asked, with an appealing look; "but she does not give herself up to any one, don't you also think so?" . . . he asked again, looking searchingly into Berthea's eyes.

“ She soars far too high above them for that ! ” was Berthea’s decisive answer, as he turned on his heel.

Saturday, the day of the general meeting, was only two days off.

It was obvious that Dr. Borvig was all excitement. He had a feeling that quite a stirring contest was in the air. . . . He never mixed himself up, in such matters—was doctor on principle, and nothing else but doctor among the families—and did not particularly sympathise with all the modern ideas. But he would not have possessed the heart of a father if he had not taken an interest in this election. . . . And really not altogether on Kjel’s account. These old fogeys wanted a good shaking up, to shake all the dust out of them. . . . Just fancy, as good as to refuse to support the new railway with the savings of the district, and to compel business men to borrow money outside the district at a higher rate of interest. . . . He began to lean to the opinion that some one like Kjel was really much wanted as one who could be the helm of the savings bank.— Well, that’s their business. . . .

He was taking a turn round the room for, perhaps, the hundredth time in these days, his reflections always bringing him to the same conclusion, when Kjel came in, pale and hurried.

He threw himself into a chair and sat there silent, staring vacantly before him.

"Anything wrong with the savings bank?" asked the doctor, sharply.

Kjel sat dumb.

"Well, one must not always take it for granted that things will succeed."

Kjel shook his head, so the doctor understood he was on the wrong tack.

"A nice look out!" Kjel exclaimed. "Doesn't it seem as if the devil himself is in it? Everything in order — absolute majority. — The thing was so sure that I might say I had it in my pocket right up till this afternoon, when I got this letter. Arne Bergersen refuses to renew—will not undertake any further responsibilities for the company. . . . He drives us into a regular corner, demands a statement of affairs, and wants to get out of the business altogether; has given notice that he withdraws his guarantee.—And if I cannot get a good name in his place at once, we shall stand there on Saturday as defaulters. The bank granted the money on the security of all our eleven names.—And then—adieu to the directorship. It would not do even to propose me.—Such a vile trick.—Just a day or two before it falls due, so that I should not have time to get another name instead. . . . So shamefully calculated, too!—For he knows well enough that if I have to look for a new man as guarantor, it will only bring the company's credit to be talked about and discussed. . . . If it had only

been the day after, I could easily have got three for every one right on the spot. But just now!"—Kjel stared gloomily at the floor.

"Not the slightest risk—safe and sound in every respect . . . a dividend next year of fifty per cent. at the very least.—There stand their names as guarantors, one for all and all for one, eleven men in all.—Well, there is no help for it, I must give it up as lost—hard though it be!" He sighed. "Any ordinary, well-known name in the parish would do.— —If I could only be sure of his name on the bill till Monday or Tuesday I could easily arrange matters, and let him off," exclaimed Kjel. "But now! Well, well, what is lost is lost!—I must be off, nevertheless, and get a name somehow—and then the idea of becoming director will have to be given up."

A stillness fell upon the room in the gathering twilight.

"Yes, it is hard, Kjel, I must admit."

Kjel pulled out his handkerchief, wiped his eyes, and blew his nose.

"I say, Kjel," the doctor said in a low voice, "you never keep your word to me."

"Oh, you know well enough, father—if it came to a push, then—"

"Would my name do, do you think?"

"Oh, a less important than yours would do," said Kjel, in his off-hand way, "any name known in the parish."

“Well, you give me your word as my son that you will not get me into any trouble— —Will you give me your word of honour that I shall be out of it on Monday or Tuesday—for preference, Monday? —then you shall have my name. . . . I will put my name to it, my lad, so that you can become director now, when so much depends on it.”

Kjel blew his nose.

“Since you offer it to me, father This is really good of you. . . . I shall never forget it!”

“But we’ll say nothing to mother—nothing to mother about it, Kjel, she, she, she—it would worry her too much. Give me the paper, and let me have done with it—I might repent it,” he said, hastily.

IX

IT was a quiet, still September day, with a clear sky. The trees had nearly all cast their leaves, but here and there one could see the sparse yellow leaves of the birch, or the red leaves of the ash, down by the river which flowed past the farmsteads, bright as a silver streak.

In the afternoon the sound of kariol wheels was heard on the main road.

It was Kjel. He threw the reins to the servant-lad, and rushed into his father's study.

"This is now the fourth message you have sent for me. The people down at the mill must think there is something wrong here. I know well enough it is your name you want back, right off on the spot. . . . And you *shall* have it back. But one can't do more than what is in a human being's power."

"In a human being's power!" thundered the doctor. "It is two months now since the day I was to have my good name back—two months, in which every day has been a torture to me, Kjel—every day, I tell you."

"But father, can't you listen?" cried Kjel.

"No, I will not listen—I will have my name back . . . two months, I tell you, in which I have not been able to drive, a single day, through the parish without thinking that it is known that Dr. Borvig has taken to speculating in forests—has put his name to a business venture twenty times bigger than what he is worth."

"Oh, yes, running the risk of making a couple of thousands next year."

"Silence, Kjel!—do you hear?—silence, or by heaven!"—shouted the doctor lifting his arm. "Not a day, I tell you of all the sixty-three.—I have counted them and the nights as well—not a day, on which I have been able to look your mother in the face. I avoid her, . . . we, who have lived together as in a dovecote for thirty-four years. I tell you—out with my name, lad. . . ." The doctor made a step forward, and clutched at him, as if to seize him by the throat.

"What the devil!" exclaimed Kjel, pushing a chair in front of him. "If you are mad and won't listen . . . I tell you, you shall have your name. That's the very thing I have been attending to—so that, once and for all, I can get rid of these lamentations and foolish messages."

"When, when, when? At what time?"

"I don't know! If you won't listen I must go home and write a letter to you."

“ Well then, speak !—out with it.”

“ Bless me, if I’ve ever seen anything like this ! Here I come with such results . . . my pocket full, so to speak, of news—better than I ever hoped or expected—and then I hear, ‘ Out with the name, out with it ! ’ It’s a mercy one hasn’t been strangled ! How can I help it, if this little good name of yours, as you call it, will stick to the paper as if it were pasted down ? If they didn’t think so much of you they would be glad enough to let you out of it—for it isn’t exactly for the pleasure of having to do with you that”

“ Well, well—and then ? ”

“ Well, I came to tell you that the company has to-day bought the rest of the Black Forest—thirty thousand acres—on condition that the owners go equal shares, whether loss or profit, and mind you—all the timber is to be sawn at my mill — — the company in consequence is to be enlarged—the profits simply incalculable ; as far as I am concerned it is only a simple rule of three. If four thousand acres have yielded me so much sawing in the year, what then about the thirty thousand which really includes the full-grown trees ? And, as far as you are concerned, it means that now four for every one would buy you out the moment the papers are signed. . . . They simply envy you the profits ; it’s only a question whether I should not use the opportunity to secure you a premium for retiring.”

“No ; not a cent—not a cent, Kjel. I’ll have it settled in private—only get the name off the paper. I shall not have any peace till that is done. The day I get it back your father will be another man. God forgive you, that you could lead me into all this which is altogether so far and away from anything I want to be mixed up in.”

“It ought all to be settled in the course of next week,” remarked Kjel, pensively. “Yes, father, this will now be quite a future for me—to date from to-day. . . . And I must say I can no longer stand seeing the shavings from John Vaaler’s planing works floating down the river past my mill. I am going to extend my place as well—at once. . . . I have really been so successful that I am almost afraid of myself. I must now be off to Thekla, and tell her about it. Phew ! father, it was a tough job before it could be arranged.”

“Well, well ; it may be right enough, and satisfactory enough. But the name, the name, my lad. . . . I shall feel as if I had just come out of prison the day I see it again.”

“Well, I never thought you could be so over anxious, father. . . . Your name you shall have back in any case, and with many thanks into the bargain. For it was that which made me director of the bank, and which has brought me all the success up till now, together with to-day’s.”

"Well, that's a comfort anyhow," mumbled the doctor.

"And I shall still remain director, of course. No one can turn me out after this. . . . I am like the old man of the sea, now they have once got me on their back . . . for the more they do to uphold me the more credit they get themselves. It is a case of up with me, up with themselves; down with me, down they go, and the whole of the new business world here. I am just their man—I and nobody else!" he nodded, as he put on his hat.

"Here is the postman, father," he called from the front door.

Shortly after reading his letters, the doctor sauntered down the garden path with a paper in his hand.

Mrs. Borvig was in the garden, gathering her choicest apples, which had to be picked one by one, and not shaken down. She stood on a step-ladder, which Massy was steadying, picking and handing them carefully down, to be placed on a cloth spread out on the ground.

"It is very curious, Bente, but things don't look so very bad after all. . . . I really believe I am beginning to reap some benefit through Kjel's transactions. Here are no less than two hundred crowns, sent to me as commission by Harstad the forest-proprietor. I am very much mistaken in human nature if this isn't a kind of prudent desire on his

part to be on the good books of the bank director's father. . . . I cannot very well send them back either, with an intimation that they would not influence the applications for loans in the savings bank. . . ."

An apple fell down and rolled on to the cloth.

"They will just come in usefully to send to Minka, you see."

"This is no jesting matter, Borvig. If it really is as you think, it is not a very pleasant thing to receive this money."

"Oh, I don't know, Bente; I think I may venture to take upon my conscience a small, indirect fee like this, in return for all I sacrifice for the welfare of the family. . . . One gets, unexpectedly, a few benefits, when one's son is getting on in the world, in the shape of increased respect and esteem. . . . And Kjel is getting a good deal to the front now."

"We must bear in mind that this sort of business carries risk with it, like Blondin walking across Niagara," she muttered.

"Oh yes, let us by all means go on looking gloomily at things. The more progress the more suspicious we become. . . . When his saw mill is so filled with timber from the Black Forest that he doesn't know which way to turn, and must soon extend his place—then we must mourn and sigh—and scowl at him until he is nearly driven mad.

Yes, for now he has really succeeded in securing that part of the business which is without risk to him—the sawing of the timber for the whole company. That's the very cream of it."

"Well, I only hope it may turn out as well as you think. It is altogether so grand that it makes one anxious—and—can one really carry on business without any risk, Borvig?"

"Pooh! What madness. You always seem to think there is a powder magazine down at Kjel's. . . . When things go forward you want them to go backwards. . . . It has come to this, that I actually dread to bring a bit of good news from Kjel's—you wilfully throw cold water on my happiness. . . . I should really like to know if I came and told you the whole business was on the point of failing——"

"And it was all up," came involuntarily from the top of the ladder.

"What? . . . I really think you sit up there in the apple tree like a bird of evil omen—very pleasant and encouraging, isn't it?"

"As long as no flood from down there carries our house and your good name away with it."

"Fie for shame! always this eternal, irritating 'Keep away, keep away, keep away' from your own son!"

"There is a kariol—two—coming up the hill," called out Massy. "The first is Mr. Lunde, the manager, and then the inspector."

The doctor appeared much relieved in his mind as he walked to the garden gate.

There would, at any rate, be an opportunity for killing time this evening with a game of boston . . . perhaps, after all, only good news, which justified a glass of toddy.

Massy, who had been down to the saw-mill in the morning, on a visit to little Baard, resumed the interrupted conversation and prattle with her mother :

“ I'll never marry a fool, mother.”

“ No, I quite agree with you in that, Massy.”

“ Kjel is a fool.”

“ H'm ! ”

Massy would not give any reason ; but Kjel was a fool.

She stood thinking awhile.

“ If I marry, my child might easily become an inventor or a learned man, or a big man, who would come to govern the country. It might happen, mightn't it ? ”

“ Bless the child !—you mustn't go about with such ideas, Massy. You mustn't get such mad notions into your head.”

“ But it might happen. I am only asking. . . . It might happen. Neither Cæsar's nor Luther's mother knew she would have such a wonderful child, . . . nor Napoleon's mother, either, whose son became Emperor.”

“Look round you in the parish, Massy, and see if you think there are any Napoleons or Hannibals among the young men.”

Massy did not appear to be convinced.

“And fancy how disappointed all mothers would be over their children if they had been dreaming of only Hannibals and Martin Luthers.— —And whatever I might wish to think about you, children—you are certainly not of that sort, any of you. . . . A mother must be thankful if her children turn out good and respectable.”

“Yes, but it *might* happen, you know, mother,” continued Massy, eagerly, “that’s all I mean.”

“Such extravagant notions only end in disappointments, Massy. Those who only expect little are all the more thankful when they get more.”

“But did you expect so little then, mother?—for you are fond enough of us.”

“I don’t say, Massy,” laughed Mrs. Borvig, “that your mother, when she was your age, didn’t also have her dreams that life would be a wonderful fairy-tale, ‘south of the sun, and east of the moon, at the back of Babylon’s tower.’ But we soon grew out of that. It seemed to be in the air at that time to be contented. Now it is as if a whole wall has been pulled down—leaving the whole world open to us in all its dazzling brightness; it seems, in fact, that nothing is impossible any more. . . . But you see, Massy, strength and work are necessary. . . .

And there are now so many who live only in illusions and think themselves great," she went on, bitterly. "Now it is the fashion to dream, and imagine oneself born to great things and a brilliant destiny. But as far as I can see, it comes to nothing but castles in the air and disappointments;—I never see that they reach their goal. Don't delude yourself, Massy, with the belief that you are an exception."

"But it *might* happen, mother; I only say that it might happen."

"I don't even believe that it *might* happen. Hannibal's father and mother felt, I am sure, that they were of a good stock; it did not come quite so unexpectedly upon them."

Massy appeared to be lost in thought—she felt there was still something more to be said on the subject . . . She would reserve that for Schulteiss, when she would introduce it so skilfully, and pretend she referred to Minka.

"I will take the basket, mother, and carry all the apples—only do come down carefully from that ladder."

When the apples had been taken upstairs into the yellow room, and she had finished spreading them out on the table, she attacked Schulteiss, who stood at the landing window watching Arnt's experiments in dynamite blasting over by the summer-house, the explosions of which rattled through the air and

disturbed the stillness of the quiet autumn day with their far-reaching peal of thunder.

"I should be awfully sorry if Minka got married to a stupid man while she's up in town," she began.

Schulteiss gave a start.

"Is there anything—have you heard anything?" he exclaimed hurriedly.

"Oh, no ; I only say *if*—and that I should be so sorry."

"Really a most remarkable flight of fancy, Massy—so entirely outside the bounds of possibility—unless—" his expression became startled again, "unless you have some intimation, ever so small a proof, on which you could build your — — None? None? . . . Really none? No, of course. . . . Ha, ha!" he laughed. "But you would be sorry, if it were to happen? Yes, so should I ; a stupid husband, a stupid husband . . . truly a ridiculous, an impossible idea."

"Yes ; but supposing now she did marry a stupid man—one whom *she* thought was clever, but who was really stupid. . . . Wouldn't that be a very sad thing?"

"Impossible—quite impossible."

"Well, I'll tell you I have been thinking to myself that she might have quite remarkable children—and I should be their aunt, and if she now——"

"A strange subject. . . . A—so to speak—almost

intolerable, terrible supposition, which I would rather not discuss. . . . Ah! the *naïveté* of young girls is truly surprising."

"I simply want to know if a stupid father doesn't have stupid children."

"Yes—that is to say — — but perhaps the mother on the other hand might be all the more gifted. After all there are so many sides to that question."

"But *if* Minka was fond of a really handsome, fine man——"

"Minka. . . . I beg you, Massy, not to talk like that; you make me feel hot all over!"

"You always say yourself that Minka is so remarkable—and if her husband were also remarkable——"

Schulteiss stood silent a moment; he was becoming more and more excited.

"Your train of thought betrays want of feeling," he exclaimed; "can only be excused by the gross and grotesque conceptions of immature girlhood. Your mind is still filled with dolls in spite of your sixteen years. . . . Why the very thought of it is," . . . here he threw back his head. . . . "Minka! The proud woman—with her great mission in life—and her great expectations—she—she will never give herself up to anybody 'remarkable'—to any remarkable, handsome, fine man—with or without moustaches—to any remarkable professional man—

any remarkable North Pole explorer — — For, understand me clearly, young lady—let it also penetrate into your still obscure mind!—she unconsciously carries in her glorious nature the great craving for love—she does not demand goods chattels, or gold—nor external skin-deep beauty, nor this nor that particular intellectual ability—nothing, nothing of that kind. . . . Her noble and ideal nature, so full of sentiment, craves for the great passion—a love strong as life and death . . . and when she finds *that* burning—even if in a fragile frame—she will, the day when her eyes are open, give herself up at last. . . . Such a love is as unfathomable as the elements. . . . the transitory body glows in it, and the spirit soars upwards, and,” he stared pale with ecstasy up into the heavens, “I do not say that it should not possess the ability to call forth, to create geniuses . . . that which is beyond—beyond all understanding—beyond all understanding!”

Massy noticed with horror that his eyes were rolling as if loose in their sockets.

A little while after Schulteiss sat in his room reading a letter, which the doctor had handed him across the whist-table.

The letter which Minka had once promised him, the one he had so long been waiting for, had come to-day.

Pale blue, in an elegant, perfumed envelope—addressed to Mr. Ananias Schulteiss, M.A., doctor of languages . . . sealed by Minka herself.

“DEAR TEACHER OF MY YOUTH,

“Whom in all this wide, wide world could I venture to confide in but one—one alone? In you, Mr. Schulteiss”

The words danced before his eyes, and he was obliged to read them over again. He drew a deep breath.

“You, my tried friend,—to you I venture to show myself as I am. You will always understand me, you who have an eye for that which to me appears as the one glorious thing in life—to kindle beauty and ideality in the great men of the time. You understand me?”

“I will now tell you a little about myself. . . . Dressed in brown, with red and yellow trimming, a hat with a broad brim, and a short veil which hides the eyes until you suddenly come upon them unawares—you only suspected they were there.

“Pretty boots, buttoned high—you know I have pretty feet, Mr. Schulteiss—so that one can step out both smartly and daintily, as if mindful of the mud. But what I have been obliged to study thoroughly till at last I have mastered it, is

how to carry myself, how to walk. I have heard the gentlemen's remarks when they look back after the ladies. It's those with the wavy, undulating gait that they like,—and an erect figure . . . Either unsoiled gloves or none. And a pretty parasol with a stylish handle. Behind this lurks the serpent—the magnetic element—oscillating from behind its shelter. One receives salutes—and one smiles—smiles as if at one's own thoughts and as if one saw nothing”

“Great Heaven! her beautiful smile,” sighed Schulteiss.

“Starts as if taken by surprise—and a thousand other innovations of woman's genius—an armoury of effective weapons.

“Yes, thus is the pirate equipped, the one who was launched from your homely port, Mr. Schulteiss.

“I confide myself to your profound understanding. Your soul must not be darkened by the suspicion that I am likely to give way to any weakness—to anything like an ordinary love affair. I feel that I nearly—very nearly—have Mr. Finstrand in my power—that I possess an influence over him which he cannot resist. If I only had him wholly in my power, I might put all my fire and colour into his poetry. Oh, Mr. Schulteiss, to electrify such a man's pen, to feel that it is really I who sparkle in it—that all his poetry is only Minka! But there is something in

the way which throws a shadow. And now I will be doubly candid, Mr. Schulteiss.

“ I am so afraid that you may mislay or lose my letter in some way, and that I shall be betrayed, or that your looks will awaken suspicion !

“ I have not been in town this summer as the postmarks and the dates on the letters have led you all to believe. I have been on a walking tour up in the mountains in company with some literary and artistic friends. We took up our quarters on three *sæters** and rocked ourselves on a glorious mountain lake where we saw ourselves as in a magic mirror ; and I dressed in peasant costume and was painted.

“ I felt like a princess, a being perfumed by a higher aroma, until the time when Mr. Finsland had so suddenly to go back to town. Why ? Why ? That is the shadow which darkens. . . .

“ It seemed to me, all at once, as if the whole spirit of the thing, that which had given all the intoxicating fascination, was gone. I was only myself again when the day before yesterday I found myself back in town again, breathing the same air as he. . . .

“ I intended to have continued this letter—but fancy ! As I was out walking this evening, a man stooped down and looked at me. . . . Those eyes

* Norwegian mountain dairies.

haunt me—those terrible eyes. . . . You can guess who it was. That terrible person——”

“Varberg! . . . Great God!” burst out Schulteiss. He sat down, and rocked his head in his hands moaning, while the pale September sunlight cast its waning light upon him.

X

MRS. KJEL BORVIG walked hurriedly along the road holding her umbrella up against the rain. She did not give herself time to take off her goloshes and cloak in the hall, but went straight into the doctor's study.

"I should like to speak to you, grandfather," she exclaimed excitedly.

"Anything the matter with little Baard?"

She shook her head and sat down on a corner of the sofa. She seemed greatly agitated and it was some time before she could speak.

"I have come to ask your advice. I have been awake the whole night and have considered the matter from every point of view, and I would now like to know how far one has to consider one's family I want to know exactly how far my duty as a wife goes. With regard to my duty as a human being I am quite clear. . . . Here is the dilemma—to what extent have I by marriage bound my person?"

"But, my dear Thekla, you speak as if there was something serious the matter between you and Kjel."

Thekla smiled bitterly and leant her head against the back of the sofa :

“ Oh no, as far as that goes—to tell the truth—we are only sorry we ever got married.”

“ I would ask you first, Thekla, to consider if it is quite right to mix your husband’s parents up in your affairs. I know Kjel’s weak point is his devotion for you ; and that you are, at all events, a true friend and dutiful wife to him ; of that I am equally convinced. I respect your character, Thekla.”

Thekla breathed heavily.

“ I have to ask advice of the only person I dare confide in, my husband’s father. I ask again and again what is a wife’s duty and how far does it go ? Am I obliged to live, eat, drink, clothe myself—in short, take part in the speculations of a man who I have no doubt is carrying them on with other people’s money ? ”

“ Good heavens, Thekla ! What is it you say ? ”

“ There is no doubt about it.”

“ You must be mistaken, Thekla,” remarked the doctor coldly. “ What foundation have you for it ? Have you any facts to go upon ? ”

“ That is just what I have come to confide to you I came home unexpectedly yesterday from the branch of the Society for distribution of useful literature, and from my bedroom I heard Kjel talking loudly, trying to appease some one in the

dining-room. They talked quite openly about bankruptcy and their despair in connection with their last purchase, the Black Forest. I thought myself justified in listening further. . . . For that was certainly not how Kjel had represented the matter to me! The stranger was one of the partners in the company. He seemed to be utterly crestfallen. The much talked of ten thousand acres which they had bought appeared to have been thinned down to a surprising extent; a large quantity of saleable timber had been disposed of just before the owners got their *misère* foisted upon Kjel and his partners. And Kjel replied with some argument to the effect that a bad speculation must be retrieved by a good one—that the company would have to begin buying forests on a large scale, even if they had to carry on by raising money on bills till there was an opportunity of making a *coup*! The first thing the company now had to show was that it could produce timber. . . . For there was plenty of time to go bankrupt, he repeated. — — And now I should like to know how far a wife's duties go."

The doctor's face had turned ashy grey.

"It seems as if Kjel has had the rather difficult task to perform of pacifying a partner who has been seized with a panic," he said, coolly and reassuringly, "and that he has advised them to try and make up for a bad speculation with a more successful one. I think, Thekla, it is a wife's absolute duty to

hold her tongue about her husband's affairs and not to make things more difficult, if there is any trouble."

Thekla nodded slowly, and said bitterly: "I am bound by golden fetters I see I must take the consequences. . . ."

"Excuse me, Thekla," the doctor interrupted suddenly, "but I must ask you to go now—I—I——"

The doctor seized hold of a chair as if to support himself.

"I can only say," said Thekla, sighing deeply and rising, "that I go no wiser than I came. I am confronted with the same dilemma. . . . I must ask you to give my compliments to the ladies in the sitting-room, and say that your son's wife is not in a humour to-day to look in upon them."

When she was gone, the doctor began pacing hurriedly up and down the room, his forehead bathed in perspiration. Suddenly he made a rush for the window, threw it open, and was seized with a violent fit of vomiting. It was a complaint from which he suffered when he became greatly agitated and could not give vent to his feelings.

A messenger was sent for Kjel.

Kjel was just stepping into his kariol to attend a meeting of the company, which had been suddenly called. He could not get to Elvsæt till four o'clock.

The doctor sat at his desk, resting his head on his

arm. He was absorbed in thought and evidently in great distress, and did not look up when Kjel entered the room.

“ Well, father, . . . you are deucedly quiet. . . . Is there anything wrong again ? ”

“ You might be a little more straightforward with me, Kjel,” he said quietly. “ That last purchase of the Black Forest was only so-so, I presume, if not to say. . . . ”

“ Where have you heard that, father ? . . . Has any one said anything ? ” asked Kjel hastily.

“ No, but I go about a good deal among the tenants and hear a little of everything—the woodcutters— ”

“ Tut, tut—straightforward—straightforward. . . . If that were all that was necessary ! I am only too willing to acknowledge that we are in low water, very low at present. I should deny it, of course, to anyone else who might happen to say anything of the kind, but between ourselves—well, yes. It is true we have been cheated over the transaction, shamefully cheated, and not to a small extent either, it seems to me . . . but it isn't quite so bad as I thought at first—I feared that the ground had been swept entirely clear of everything in the shape of timber. To begin with, that is not exactly the case . . . and if we can only wait a few years, the forest will have grown again, and we shall have the same chance. The whole thing reduces itself to a

question of waiting—to be able to retain the property in the meantime of course it will try our pockets somewhat; but then, we are sufficiently numerous to stand it.”

The doctor sat staring absent-mindedly. The furrows in his forehead became more and more prominent.

“Kjel, could you not in some way get me out of the business?” he asked confidently. “It is worrying the very life out of me you must get me out of it don’t you think you could do that for your father, my lad? You have so many resources when you once set to work. And I am not worth so very much after all just find some way of getting me out of it.”

“It’s a beastly difficult affair” said Kjel, beginning to stride up and down the room in great excitement. “You know, of course, father, that had we not really been pushed, I would have got you out of it long ago, and not let it run on ever since midsummer last year. But one can’t do everything one likes, and this swindling business which came so confounded inconveniently—all this means it will take much more time to settle up everything. . . . You see it takes longer to pull a load up hill than to sit and slide down with it when everything is going well. . . .”

“Kjel,” said the doctor, rising suddenly from his seat, “I will pay to get out of it—I’ll pay what I

can get together—two thousand crowns. I will pay you in cash.”

“It’s a pity, a great pity, that matters should take such a turn. One feels inclined to take one’s shirt off and sell it, if it would do any good.”

“And you think you can’t do anything for it, Kjel—now, soon,” he said, imploringly, “not—not even if I pay the two thousand?”

“I both can and will, father, if you’ll only give me time! Surely I ought to find somebody amongst all the names I have at my disposal, especially when I have as much as two thousand crowns to pull it through with.”

“You shall have them, Kjel—on the spot, if only I get my name back.”

“For two thousand crowns is a very tempting morsel, father, in these hard times.”

Kjel paced up and down, pondering, his eyes fixed on the floor.

“I think, by Jove, I’ve hit on the very man—still highly thought of in the bank—especially on account of his well-known promptitude, and also on account of my warm recommendation. . . . I shall have to proceed as they do with the Russian soldiers, when they are sent under fire—cannons at the back of them and encouragement in front of them. . . . It is really too bad that you should have to pay out this money . . . but I will owe it you as quite a separate item, for it is I who——”

“ On this table—you will find them on this table, Kjel—only my name !”

“ To think of all the money that is tied up in the sawmill. . . . It is insured for forty-five thousand—a small enough amount—besides the deals, the value of which varies. If I only had that money at my disposal, or if it wasn't so impossible to get a loan on that class of security, I should be a Cræsus at once—should buy the Aaseral forest! I have been offered it for thirty-five thousand, cash. I have the refusal of it in writing ; in fact, the rest of the purchase-money can be paid in yearly instalments . . . and there is this remarkable thing about the forest—I have really seen it, both I and others—that it is full of timber for hundreds of thousands, has stood almost untouched for twenty-three years . . . and the reason is that the river and the right of floating belongs to the Black Forest, so it scarcely pays to cut the timber there, unless—mark you, father—unless both forests belong to the same party. Then the outlook is different. Now you understand what I am driving at. And thirty-five thousand—five and thirty thousand. If only it had been last year ! If only it had been before Christmas, I could have found the money as easily as anything. Anyhow, the grapes do not hang beyond my reach.”

“ I say, Kjel,” suggested the doctor, as his son was about to leave, “ there would be no harm in telling Thekla now and then a little about your

affairs. A wife so easily begins to worry herself if there is anything she does not understand, and she may be going about imagining all sorts of things to herself. I don't say you should unbosom yourself entirely about your difficulties . . . but this about Aaseral, for instance, would interest her, you know ; it would give her some encouragement. She will be anxious enough to know something about your affairs—I'm sure she will—although it is only business."

Endre arrived quite unexpectedly to spend part of the summer at home.

He had just gone through some painful explanations in the study with his father, whom he had found strangely softened and a good deal aged. He then beguiled his time in lounging round the farm accompanied by Massy whom he questioned about the various affairs of the family—about Arnt, who was greatly interested in the construction of the railway, and was busily engaged in road-making and engineering works and dynamite blasting over in the hill behind the summer house ; and how Schulteiss thought he would be able to get him passed at the forthcoming examination in the spring so that he could enter the Technical School ; she herself had already passed the examination this year. Massy was in a hurry to get out into the world and learn something, also at a Technical

School for preference. She wanted to be an architect—to draw and invent and fit up houses, each prettier than the other. Drawing and mathematics were her strong subjects. She had already made up her mind how she would build her own house . . . but that, of course, would depend whether she got married or not—and that again would depend whether she found any one whom she liked very, very much.

Endre stuck his eye-glass in position and muttered :

“ All alike—whether they build in the air or build of bricks, a man is sure to appear on the scene.”

And what was that about Berthea, who rushed off to-day to the auction at Lystad ? Was she engaged to this parish dandy Schölberg, the auctioneer, or was she not ? Or was Massy a silly goose who didn't know anything about so complicated a business ?

Endre now caught sight of Schulteiss, who came out of the front door, and shouted to him as he lifted his hat.

“ Back again under the paternal roof, you see—the moral stud farm where one is bred and fed with the fodder of illusions—ready to be slaughtered as soon as one finds oneself on the world's market-place. Isn't that so ? . . . One needs a little recreation, now and then, you know, after one's daily

struggle in a career—in which one doesn't seem to get on too fast—” he said, nodding to Schulteiss and going up the steps to meet him.

“So here we are back again in the family stronghold—walled in, bricked up and nailed down—even to one's views Can one imagine anything more satanically adapted for misleading the mind than such a perfect walled-in home?—where one may work oneself into illusions of all kinds; where one certainly gets one's food three times a day and one's bed at night one comes out into the world with his knapsack full of simplicity,” he exclaimed with a jaunty air, as Mrs. Borvig came to serve the coffee.

“I should have thought it was well not to lose too much of that self-same simplicity, Endre,” answered Mrs. Borvig; “it is after all the cheerful belief which keeps up one's courage.”

“I fancy I hear the hammer nailing down maxims again. . . . The belief in what? The belief that every thing is just and righteous in this world!” he laughed scornfully.

“Well, one may of course meet with disappointments; but after all there is always something which in the end supports one.”

“Nails and hammer blows! Yes, we are terribly righteous as we sit here in this room—particularly when we declaim from our high and lofty pinnacle. I come home like a drenched dog after all the

teachings of my childhood. . . . This *naïveté* which will never wear out but it seems it is necessary—it seems it must be continually reproduced in the homes in order that there may be a sufficient number of people who are willing to let themselves be led by the nose, and be allured into illusions. It is nature's own wise arrangement, it appears."

"I cannot bear to hear that language, Endre," said his mother, reproving him somewhat sharply.

"Well, well, mother—I'll say no more."

"I should have provided a morally unclean home for you children in your youth; is that what you mean? Speak out, Endre."

"Oh, no; but a little draught of air, and a few cracks and crevices leading out to some of the wickedness of this world—a little early experience of the golden righteousness—would not have harmed us. One must not cheat, one must not swindle, but one may be cheated, one may be swindled. But I will not disturb the idyl, mother."

Endre placed one leg over the other and began gulping down his coffee.

"Take, for instance, the reason I have not yet succeeded in getting an appearance," he commenced excitedly; "why, it's all intrigues and back ways, flattery and cringing, scandal-mongering and private influence! If I had only been taught at home how to put some of those wheels in motion!

One may be a sounding-board both for a Shakspeare and a Goethe and possess ever so much understanding and feeling—but if, for instance, some one with a hooked nose or a pointed chin, or a pair of eyes that roll and goggle—in other words, if one is not an automaton one is rejected. And if one *is* an automaton, possessing only *that* smile, *that* voice to vibrate with, *that* grin which at a distance looks as if one were deeply moved, one may be ever so stupid and empty-headed and brainless—then *he* may play Shakspeare, *he* may play Schiller. For *he* is the man—according to the judgment of this righteous world! Whereas he is but an empty, empty automaton. . . .”

“Yes, indeed, Mr. Endre—it’s the eternal struggle between the outer husk and the spirit,” acquiesced Schulteiss.

“Otherwise I know so deucedly well how I ought to tackle them,” continued Endre. “I begin to think I was born to be a critic. . . . One would scarcely feel such burning indignation unless there were a vocation at the bottom of it. . . . The world greatly needs to know what criticism is. And one’s position would at once become so awfully favoured, mother—so pleasant, so comfortable, so lucrative . . . instead of being one of those who are criticised—one of the victims—to become one of those who criticise, who can hiss or applaud as much as they like, and kill a poor actor by simply gaping.

— — Yes, there is really nothing else to say about the whole blessed thing”—he exclaimed with a *blasé* air, “nothing else but that one feels so mightily inclined to ‘shuffle off this mortal coil’ Life is of so little value. . . . If only one had a little of that wretched article called money—for then everything glides along smoothly enough in this righteous world. That is to say, if you could satisfactorily explain to me, Mr. Schulteiss, whether, on the whole, it is really worth while keeping up such a thing as one’s will. The Chinese say that life is too short to make it worth while becoming rich by saving.”

Schulteiss looked up startled. He had been sitting absent-mindedly taken up with only one thought—to get some news of Minka.

“But so accustomed have we become to this ‘good world’ where persons of mind and ideals must petition the blockheads, that people like us, Mr. Schulteiss—who have been so thoroughly cheated out of our portion of the ideal—only drag along, only drag along—instead of now and then falling into a reverie over such a little dynamite cartridge as Arnt is playing with over there, instead of now and then feeling a certain inclination—a shiver—the blood gurgling in revolt—and crash! down goes the whole show. It’s only a little playful thought of mine, mother. . . . This incomprehensible state of things—why should we attach such an exorbitant

value to this suffering, preposterous, stupid, mean existence? We actually cling to it to the last by our very nails, when a slight blow on the detonating cap of the cartridge would settle the whole thing—burst open the gate—to perhaps a greater stage than this of which we are so heartily tired. A proud spirit throws——”

“A proud spirit would not use such language, Endre,” said his mother. “You must pardon me for saying it, but if there is any one in whose hands I would securely place the dynamite, without fear of its being used for any other purpose but declamation and silly talk, it would be in yours,” she said angrily, as she took up the coffee-tray and left the room.

“Pardon me, Mr. Endre your sister, Miss Minka,” began Schulteiss, turning towards him. “How is she, if I may ask?”

“She sends you her compliments, Mr. Schulteiss, begs to be remembered to you. Oh, well, by-the-bye,” he drawled out, “this new career of hers, you know some gift she has within her. But this is strictly between ourselves, Mr. Schulteiss—she was found the other day in a hypnotic sleep—remembered nothing afterwards—most remarkable. . . . She is just a string of quivering nerves. . . . She considers herself at times two persons. . . . She has created not a little sensation in town. There is a rumour that Finsland has

made a complete psychological study of her and will make her the principal figure in a dramatic poem."

Schulteiss' face suddenly brightened up.

"Highly—highly interesting! The object of the poet's cool reflection: she takes her place as the inspiring soul in his work. . . . But does not give herself away—does not give herself away—is a free force, all conscious of herself—truly a result already!"

The doctor was on his way home from his rounds.

He had been out all day over long and stony byroads, visiting some poor patients in his district and was now driving comfortably in his kariol along the broad highway.

He had not felt so well and strong for a long time. Had he not been riding an old jog-trot mare fourteen miles through the woods, and gone on foot the last two miles of hilly, almost impassable roads there and back, as if it were nothing? Just as tough and young in the legs as when he was twenty.

He put his hand to his breastpocket, where he kept his pocket-book, as if feeling for something.

He had done this from time to time during the whole of the day since Kjel had caught him up that morning on the road above the mill and handed him

the paper—the one with Baard Borvig on it, which had cost him so many anxious hours—he would not go through them again for ever so much. He felt he had begun to age through it—that he would have broken down if the matter had not soon been settled. But now he had it there safe enough. He felt unconsciously at his breast-pocket again.

Kjel had done well by him!

It seemed as if he had never had peace to think all this time, as if he had gone about taken up with fear and anxiety, and had really let things at home drift, all on account of this one thing.

By Jove, what a greeting he would give Bente!

The motion of the kariol, on its flexible shafts of ash, was quite soothing. He had been too busy earlier in the day with all sorts of people and patients and work to realise thoroughly—to understand—appreciate his new position.

“Well, well!” he puffed, as a feeling of pleasure stole over him. “I am already beginning to feel like Borvig again. . . . Things at home will have to be managed with a firmer hand. The control of late has been somewhat slack both with Minka and Berthea. . . . It is time one began to think a little about the future— —

“And there is Endre back again with his nervous, sickly, self-contemplation in exaggerated reflection, and his own remarkable self, constantly

in an illuminated transparency. One cannot conscientiously put him to any work.

"The fact is, he is not fit for anything. As soon as it is a question of perseverance and work and fulfilling one's duty he becomes impossible.

"Of course he ought to have been tackled when he was growing up— — —It is a case of decomposition or combustion of the entire will-power, all energy having been at last replaced by mere imagination, so that any kind of work becomes intolerable.

"Then such people get these divine inspirations, which must be cultivated . . . they feel themselves 'called,' " he mumbled bitterly. "Who cares to work hard for many patient years at one's books or with the hay-fork, the plough, or the horse, or blister one's hands cutting timber, if one can escape it all by climbing on a pedestal and bragging and talking about oneself—one's own most interesting self?— —

"One has a feeling of something abnormally misty over everything. It must be a general softening of the brain in our time—which breaks out in all sorts of nervous diseases, . . . Should have liked to be young again and go into the matter, have it properly laid before the world. The result no doubt of the overwhelming number of important inventions and discoveries which have been made in our generation; the brain has not been able to receive and digest them all. . . . The consequences of each one, being so far reaching change the possibilities and

conceptions to such an extent that only the next generation or perhaps the one after that, born under the new state of things, will be able fully to understand and live up to it. . . . If we suddenly got into daily postal communication with Mars, we should not feel surprised at it for more than half an hour, and in a week we should be quite accustomed to it. We have no time to think out the results of the new impressions on the brain. . . . Quite a new epoch in human culture which will fall like an avalanche upon the race."

The doctor drove on, his thoughts—fanned by a gust of the old ambition from the days when it was a question whether he should go to the university—dwelling upon the scientific problems which just now brought his profession so prominently to the front.

A solitary, reddish star, just visible above the trees, worked its way into his train of thought.

He could hardly see the rails of the fence by the side of the road. Now and then he was challenged by some carters in front of him, and he was obliged to stop and drive carefully to one side, for some load of planks which came creaking along through the darkness on its way to the railway.

He now entered upon the long sandy plain and whipped up his horse, which knew that part of the road well. His master's impatience asserted itself, and the horse fell into a sharp trot as they ascended

the steep hill from which the doctor's house could be seen.

The doctor saw the lights at Elvsæt, and a pale moonlike gleam emanating from the mill below.

This was the first time for more than a year that he had been able to pass the mill and breathe like a human being. "You have nothing to do with it now, Borvig—nothing—not mixed up in any kind of folly. The whole thing does not concern me—whether it goes up or down.

"H'm—m! I don't mean that exactly—if Kjel failed— — But he has shown he can do his father a good turn it may have cost him promises and saddled him with responsibilities besides my two thousand—he could see it was worrying the life out of me.

"But I'm only thinking of myself and my own interests.

"Poor boy, how flurried and worried he looked this morning. . . . He has now got to rid himself of this mad business with the Black Forest. Always bills, and always in want of money, of course, and it's he and no one else who can manage it and keep up the courage of the others. . . . If he only had the thirty-five thousand at his disposal for the Aaseral Forest. . . . And with Thekla's eyes continually upon him at home. . . . She, with all her theories, is really most unfit to stand by him in these uncertain, fluctuating times.

“Thirty-five thousand! thirty-five thousand! — and the boy would be all right, free and full of courage again! Just as glad and free as I am to-day.” He put his hand to his breast pocket. . . .

The horse’s hoofs clattered over the small bridge by the mill where a strong light from the reflectors of the paraffin lamps under the roof threw a blinding glare over him and his horse.

“Ugh! If a spark fell down among those shavings and everything was in a blaze, the boy would be saved, he”

“God forgive me!”

Suddenly he became unpleasantly affected by the thought, whipped up his horse, and the kariol rattled swiftly away into darkness again.

He did not slacken the pace till they had got far up the road leading to his house.

XI

THE idea for which Thekla had been working with such perseverance had—she might say with satisfaction—created a certain sensation.

The meeting for the organisation of the "Society for Reform in the Management of Children," had unexpectedly been well attended; a number of the younger married ladies of the district had put in an appearance, and the seats were otherwise well filled with persons interested in maternal affairs.

After Dr. Stenvig had introduced the subject with a calm and temperate paper, there ensued an eager and warm discussion, during which differences of opinion were expressed freely and sharply enough.

Even the well-known authority of the doctor could not prevent opposite views being advanced and courageously discussed. The debate lasted two hours and thirty-five minutes, including the voting, with the result that fourteen, against nine, voted for establishing the society on the basis of the principles which Dr. Stenvig had proposed and Thekla so strenuously upheld.

Conscious of having fought a pitched battle against

old antiquated views and prejudices, with eyes still aglow with the excitement of the discussion, and her blood all on fire with the success of victory, Thekla took her seat in the sledge with Stenvig, who had promised to drive her from the meeting to Dr. Borvig's, where she was to fetch her little Baard.

With the most scrupulous precision, and submitting herself to his judgment, she recapitulated one by one the mistakes she felt conscious of having committed during the debate in defending his ideas.

Stenvig's attention was engrossed by this interesting and, to him, flattering exchange of ideas.

The reins hung loose, and the horse worked his way laboriously up the hill.

"So to-day we have won the first real victory for our principles," he uttered, seizing her begloved right hand and giving it a hearty shake; "let it not be the last, Mrs. Borvig!"

Thekla gave a start; the look of animation in her face gave place suddenly to an expression of uncertainty.

"To me there is nothing more glorious than ideal sympathy, Dr. Stenvig . . . and therefore the intellectual ties are——"

"Those which make the best friendships," finished the doctor, enthusiastically.

"Yes—such as that which exists between us," she sighed. "Are we not two lonely intellectual beings who live in a different world to the rest?"

Stenvig looked suddenly away from the sledge, and remarked: "What a very fine view there is from this hill all the way down the river—till it seems to disappear into the wooded hills. . . ."

An expression of resolution came over Thekla's face; she fixed her piercing black eyes intently upon him.

"We will go our own way, dare to speak to each other as we like—express our thoughts—our wants to each other, Dr. Stenvig! And I, at least, want a complete adjustment of affairs. You know full well how I am situated—that I—I acknowledge it honestly and openly—have inveigled myself into a marriage with a man for whom principles—higher interests—are mere words—who might as well belong to quite a different atmosphere from the one which I breathe. You know I have given him the most satisfactory explanations—that my hope in this hopelessness was only to save my little Baard from this living burial. . . . It was the only prospect I could see of enduring life, Dr. Stenvig—until you came . . . and you will understand the desire of a kindred, womanly spirit for candour and a final understanding—candour as regards your thoughts and intentions in the event of my tearing myself loose. I tell you frankly that it will depend upon you whether I can justify my breaking the fetters to myself and to my son. I am not ashamed of my question—it is my liberty, my intellectual life, I am fighting for."

Dr. Stenvig raised his red moustaches and stared out into space in deep deliberation.

“Indeed, Mrs. Borvig,” he exclaimed in his ready, explicit manner, “one of my life’s greatest doubts is whether an intellectual being on the whole has any right to enter into a connection like marriage, which is so fettering to one’s liberty unless, so to speak, one is carried away by an irresistible, all absorbing passion—when the only excuse is that *volens volens* one is dragged down into a state of nature again.” He laid his hand in a friendly, confidential manner on hers. “I sympathise deeply with you in your unfortunate position and to return your candour and sincerity in like measure—I do not deny that personal gratification has played a part, an important part—and that a future brightened by your presence might strengthen the feeling to such an extent that— —But a youthful passion, of the kind which deranges one’s mind and senses, can scarcely be said to have existed in our relationship, which has really been a development for the benefit of us both towards a better understanding and grasp of the questions of the day. In the present state of things I find, as far as I am concerned, that the situation is not altogether clear. . . . You are—gee up, gee up!”—this was accompanied by a crack of the whip, “you are my friend and intellectual companion in arms—a relationship which I hope will increase in strength and sincerity as we work together gee up, gee up !

It is really dangerously slippery here at the bend of the road. . . .”

Mrs. Kjel stepped out of the sledge on her arrival at Elvsæt, and went into the sitting-room.

After a hasty greeting and many impatient “phews” at the heat, she took off her fur cap and handsome fur cloak bordered with skunk, and threw herself on the corner of the sofa, looking around her and apparently in no mood for conversation.

Massy pushed a footstool towards her, but looked up bewildered as she noticed that Thekla kicked it away from her.

“Well, sister-in-law,” remarked Endre, “has the battle been lost? Are the cradles still to be rocked on the old-fashioned runners in this obstinate district?”

“No, it has been won. Will you kindly tell your mother this distressing news? I would rather not occasion any sorrow in the house. . . . I see your mother is going out to make some chocolate—I suppose I shall have to drink it although I am hot enough already!” she said, puffing and unhooking some wrap at her throat. “It is Berthea’s week at housekeeping I can see, since Mrs. Borvig has to do everything herself. . . . Where is she to-day? Is there anything going on in the parish? And one may as well ask what the young lady is really up to. Her interests are quite numerous, it seems. . . . Is she taken up with . . . engaged to Mr. Schölberg the auctioneer, or to the wretched little student over at

the parsonage? She is a most lively young person. It is just as easy for Berthea to put on a lively expression suitable for an auction, as a quiet demure one fit for a parsonage."

"I really must admire your gentle tongue, Thekla. Could you not be a little more communicative, for instance, about the great meeting to-day? I am longing to hear something about the battle—really dying of curiosity."

Thekla did not condescend to answer.

"Now put that profound melancholy on one side I promise I will report the whole thing in the best and most elegant manner for the newspapers—as an event, a sign of the times up here. Oh nonsense! Just tell me all about it, and I will serve it up with a suitable sauce. I am at present practising a journalistic style—preparing myself."

"You must excuse me, Endre; but the world is already so full of twaddle, and this is just the sort of thing that you least of all can understand—a real mission.— — Yes, it may seem strange, but for the present we do not want to be advertised in any way, not till we have actually done something. . . . I suppose you think that is contrary to the usual order of things," she continued, mercilessly and sarcastically.

"Do you know you are really becoming too much like a saw blade, always rasping and grating," he burst out, putting up his eyeglass and taking a look

at her, "one would almost think you were suffering from the effects of some domestic scene at home."

"Oh no; you know everything goes smoothly there. . . . The last thing which was of no consequence—nothing is ever of any consequence to Kjel—was that one of his partners is on the brink of bankruptcy. But that seemed the most fortunate thing that could happen; at least, so I understood him to say."

After Thekla had departed Mrs. Borvig stood at the window in the yellow room.

It was a misty day, and the steady mild rain beat against the windows, and against the white mountain sides stood out in black contrast long stretches of bleak birch-trees which the mild weather had already freed of the snow.

Perhaps it meant spring—an early spring this year.

The winter had been such a long weary one, and to-day such a longing came over her to see a little sunshine again, a little bare moist ground again, and some green shoots bursting forth here and there.

It was now twenty-two years since she and Borvig first came to Elvsæt. . . . She always remembered the linden trees with the small window panes behind them, and the green front door with the leafy boughs above it on their arrival at their new home.

She herself had planted the avenue of trees, and laid out the whole of the garden with fruit trees,

currant bushes, and asparagus beds ; the aspen trees she had planted on the summer house hill were now so large that they almost hid the view down the river.

They had so long been in darkness—so long been buried in snow and ice which lay thick and heavy around them.

It was so every winter. Elvsæt would arise bright and green, with the bursting forth of spring, the twittering of birds in the hills around, and the letting loose of the cattle from their winter imprisonment.

But this year— —?

A voice within her cried for something bright, for a sunbeam, a glimpse of this bright sparkling dawn of spring which seemed to throw such a sharp glare through all the windows and doors—she would receive it without flinching.

These dark nights had lasted too long. She almost began to fancy herself a spectre walking about the yellow room.

This dark outlook and continual anxiety for the children . . . for Minka whom she so little understood, and for Berthea whom she understood too well—and like a heavy threatening cloud hovering over the whole—Kjel! . . . His beaming countenance, his restless ways and forced manner, his loud voice and confident boasting ; but behind it all how clear to her was his utter despair. Yes, she understood his unpleasant exuberant gaiety so well ; her knees trembled—she believed the crash would come

to-morrow or in the course of the week. . . . Since Christmas he had hardly done anything else but drive and rush about in his sledge or by rail up the district or to the capital; always merry-making and card-playing, a life of fêting and pleasure. . . . Was he thus trying to drown his own pangs of conscience, or did he think he could deceive those around him, while all these rumours were afloat that the credit of the company was so deeply affected? . . . How did he manage to keep things going? . . .

She had not the slightest doubt but that it was the money of the savings bank he was now scattering about him — — that she would see him standing before her, a pale, trembling thief and swindler, if she accused him of it to his face.

And was Borvig blind?

Her thoughts were often so confused that in her anxiety she did not know what to wish . . . Would it not be best that the crash and ruin came at once, while she and Borvig were still strong and active, and the swindle and the defalcations were still perhaps on a small scale?

At times she was seized with a frenzy, an ungovernable desire to step in and have the whole thing exposed.

The front door suddenly banged to, and the doctor came hurriedly up the stairs with his top boots still on. He had his portable medicine chest in his hand, and placed it in his cupboard.

“Ole Maagestad is on the point of declaring himself bankrupt—he is one of Kjel’s partners.”

Mrs. Borvig started; she saw at once the whole house of cards tumbling together.

“You understand, of course, Bente, that this is a serious business—a hole in Kjel’s calculations—more than alarming. The credit is shaken—and it is Kjel who will have to keep it all together. . . . I am afraid you were in the right, Bente . . . he has really had too small a capital to work with from the first.”

“I have all along been afraid, Borvig, that he was carrying on too grandly.”

“Goodness knows how it will all end,” he muttered sadly. “And outside the circle of these newly sprung up business men, only enemies, only people who wish him no good. . . . I tell you, Bente—the whole thing may collapse some fine day. I wonder you don’t see it. . . . Kjel cannot get money out of the air. . . . He has gone to town this morning.”

“Out of the air, no . . . but I suppose he will find a way out of it this time also, Borvig.”

The doctor stood between the open doors of the glass cupboard. Suddenly, with a gesture of despair, he ran his fingers through his hair.

“I suppose he’ll never think of running away to America, and leave us to face out all the scandal?”

Mrs. Borvig started at the thought—until now she had only seen visions of the convict’s garb.

“You should not excite yourself with all sorts of

ideas. No, no, Borvig, I do not therefore mean that we should be unprepared, and not try and accustom ourselves to the situation, whatever it may be—let us even imagine the worst so that we shall not be altogether overwhelmed if anything happens Kjel has such a talent for getting out of difficulties and with the savings bank as good as at his disposal,” she began cautiously, “there might be temptations—some irregularity or other.”

“Just so; we may as well imagine at once that the day of judgment has come. . . . Just as if Kjel goes about with the money of the bank in his pocket! As if there isn't a board of directors, a cashier—in all five men—that's to say four besides Kjel—who look after the business. You think they can go about pilfering there as the children in your larder. I can tell you all that sort of thing has been made impossible—as long as the bank-safe has not been broken into, or the cashier run away. And we must pause a moment before we make out that Kjel is a burglar but that's always the way—once let a grain of terror into a woman's imagination, and you have hysterics at once—no end of exaggeration. . . . You are getting too nervous of late, Bente; we shall really have to take care not to frighten you. And you know I came down upon you too suddenly, poor Bente, without thinking how little you can stand. . . . After all, nothing else has happened except that this fellow has gone and smashed — — But Thekla, Thekla you

know—Kjel is likely to get into hot water over this ; you might go down and see her, Bente, and try to appease her.”

The doctor was very irritable in these days. He would fly into a passion at the slightest provocation.

His temper became so bad that Endre would give a tug at his collar and swear he would leave the place. It seemed as if his presence was not tolerated in the house while he was preparing for his journalistic career. And Berthea always made her escape out at one door when her father came in at another. She was driven, so to speak, by a kind of atmospheric pressure on the appearance of her father, to take refuge in the opposite end of the house, always in fear that some kind of threatening thundercloud would burst over her head—a summons to the study, with a demand for a full explanation as to some of the incredible gossip circulating in the parish about her. She spent anxious moments in trying to discover which of her escapades would be brought up against her, and in devising all sorts of answers ready for use as the occasion might demand. Perhaps about the dances with Mr. Schölberg at the Jorstads' when at home they believed she was on a visit to the parish clerk's or the anonymous letters she had written to Mr. Jacobsen, the manager, about his *fiancée* or— —

The doctor on retiring to his bedroom began weighing and considering Kjel's position from all points of view, and remarked finally to his wife:

"Can't you see I'm trying to discover what you already have foreseen? I'm worrying myself to death to discover it. . . . You were never stupid, Bente—and have never been mistaken—I really cannot understand— —And then this about the savings bank. There are some minds, you know, which are born suspicious. But how in all the world did you come to think of it?"

The doctor's kariol was rumbling and splashing along the high road in the mud and slush late in the evening. There was a rumour of diphtheria in the lower part of the parish.

Driving against the strong wind on the sandy plain he met Kjel going at full speed in the direction of the railway station.

The doctor started, and the blood rushed to his head as his son suddenly stopped, his lips compressed with the effort of reining in his high-spirited horse.

"I'm off to town by the evening train, father.— Have you heard if the bell has rung?— —Must be there to-morrow early the bank you see," he shouted, whipped up his horse, and was soon far on the road.

"The bank," echoed in the doctor's ear like

a cry of distress, while the rumbling of the wheels died away along the plain in the distance.

The doctor saw shooting lights before his eyes . . . this generally happened when his nerves went wrong.

He took off his fur cap to cool his head against the wind.

Gee up, gee up!—crack!—He must hurry on to the child with the diphtheria.

It was late before the doctor started homewards. He had not been able to convince himself that it was a case of diphtheria, but had taken all necessary precautions to isolate the case and prevent contagion.

He was jogging along in his kariol down the ill-kept byroad accompanied by one of the people from the farm who carried a lantern and led the horse by the rein, while the doctor was enforcing upon him the importance of following the directions he had given with regard to the sick child.

There was no moonlight at this time of the night—it was so dark he could scarcely see the reins, only now and then a glimpse of a half-melted snowdrift. He did not expect to get home till after one.

It had been a relief to him that his thoughts had been occupied by the threatening epidemic, and the precautions which had to be taken to quell it in its birth.

On reaching the main road the man left him; the

doctor pulled his muffler higher up round his neck, and fell into a reverie, hearing only in the darkness the slow even trot of his horse, and now and then the clash of his hoofs. . . . Kjel's stiff, terror-stricken face appeared again before him. . . .

He had seen despair written on it, had read in it something which meant "break or bear."

And this point, to which he continually reverted,—the temptation he was exposed to in the savings bank. . . .

This continually increasing anxiety which he tried to shake off, but which always returned accompanied by still further reasons, by still greater probabilities.

Kjel's firm belief in being able to overcome all difficulties—his sanguineness. . . .

No doubt hard driven—worried to death ; perhaps the question of means of subsistence staring him every day in the face.

One would not be human—it would not be Kjel, if — —

Only an order for payment by the managing director — — a slight abuse in granting money. . . .

"Oh ! oh !" he groaned and leant forwards, "Oh, Oh !"

If Kjel smashed.

The thought had up till then stood before him as something terrible, overwhelming. . . . After all what did it really amount to?—an ordinary failure—such as happens everywhere in the commercial world

in bad times . . . he might have had to give up his house and his position and find something in a subordinate one, sufficient to live upon. Well, that would not kill any one —

But this

The doctor stared blankly before him as at a dark wall, his fears increasing every moment found guilty of fraudulent practices against the bank which had been entrusted to him—seized, arrested, condemned to a convict prison.

“And we—the convict’s father, the convict’s mother, the convict’s sisters and brothers, wife and child.”

He clenched his teeth and shook his fists.

“Poor, poor boy!

“Only thirty-five thousand, and he would be on his legs again—would not be a convict—not a — —”

“Whoa, whoa!” The doctor reined in his horse and sat lost in thought.

“With that everything could be got over with that” He groaned as he leant forward in his kariol.

“Nonsense Am I mad? Why the devil has the horse stopped here in the middle of the road? Gee up!” and he gave the horse a slash with the whip.

“Only thirty-five thousand! Kjøl looked so frightfully worried.”

“Convict life is no joke — — Little Baard would be turned out of his nest into poverty.”

The roar of the waterfall near the mill began in the darkness to mingle with his thoughts.

“And Kjel who had gone about there so secure and safe, and so much liked among them now—swindler—cheat—the millstone which would drag them all to the bottom—impostor, forger. The savings bank left like an empty gap in the parish after him. . . . The devil knows what I wanted with this cigar.”

The kariol rolled along at a rattling pace, while the doctor now and then reined in the horse, and then again urged it on with the whip.

The horse soon fell into an even, but quick, sharp, trot.

Near the bridge by the mill, the horse, as was its wont, slackened its pace.

Suddenly, in the darkness among the shavings, gleamed the phosphorescent streak of a couple of matches, which had been lighted and thrown down in passing.

The doctor took a pull or two at his lighted cigar.

“Now——”

He turned hurriedly round, staring in the direction in which he had thrown the matches. . . .

“Nonsense—that’s the look-out of the wind and the shavings. . . .”

The horse now set out with its usual eagerness homewards.

“I really don’t see why any one should cry, if an

accident did occur," he muttered, as he drove up the hill "the insurance company—the bank—abstract personalities, without any blood in them . . . who have no Borvig and no Bente to wring their hands and die of shame and sorrow—no little Massy to hide the fact that her brother is a convict. . . .

"Nonsense. . . . All bosh and nonsense. . . . Have I lost my senses?"

The cigar which he had chewed to pieces he spat out near the fence outside his house.

He called the farm lad to take the horse and asked for a lantern and a light. He had to go into the small disinfecting room in one of the out-houses and disinfect himself after his visit to the diphtheric patient.

He stood in the carbolised air washing his hands.

"If anything should happen" he thought, beginning to feel anxious.

"Well—if anything should happen—Kjel is in town.

"I think there is something wrong with me tonight—a regular fever standing here and reasoning as if I were the worst. . . . Two miserable matches, which" he pooh-poohed the idea!
"This meeting with Kjel has upset me altogether.

* * * * *

The doctor woke up with a start, as if suddenly roused from a heavy uneasy sleep or dream, by a gleam of light from the window. . . . A sudden

terror took possession of him. The perspiration stood on his brow,

He did not lift his head from the pillow but lay looking at the blind. . . .

“The moon of course . . . more of those wild notions—got them on the brain. . . . The moon — —”

He lay watching.

It became dark again and the blind could no longer be seen; then it lightened up again—by fits and starts.

“Stuff and nonsense—the moon, of course, which has risen——”

He felt an irresistible desire to get up and look out of the window in the yellow room; but he felt he dared not.

He sat upright in bed. Speak to Bente. . . . No. . . .

One would surely have heard something—some kind of cry or alarm if there was anything wrong.

He began slowly and irresolutely to put on his clothes. It was a respite for the moment.

“What is the matter, Borvig?” asked his wife.

All the doctor’s energy returned suddenly—he jumped up and rushed into the yellow room.

“Great heavens! what a strange light through the door—the wall is quite red!” cried Mrs. Borvig; she was up in a moment and struck a match to light the candle.

The doctor stood awhile at the window before he spoke.

"It really seems as if there is some kind of a fire down there," he uttered hoarsely. "Perhaps only a chimney on fire — — You see there isn't much light there now—hardly anything."

Suddenly the fire broke out again in a thick whirling smoke mixed with flames, so that the river with the floating ice, and the sheriff's farm, could be seen quite clearly.

The doctor opened his mouth as if to shriek, but closed it again. He drew his breath with difficulty.

"We must get dressed, Bente—and try and get down there—we must send a horse and boy."

"Heaven preserve us, Borvig, do you see?" shouted his wife.

The doctor stood speechless, seized with an undefined fear.

A yellowish glare was now thrown over the fields with the melting snow. The tenants belonging to the neighbouring farms came running out of their houses, and people and horses were seen on the road coming from all directions.

Suddenly the fire seemed to be extinguished, the whirling cloud of smoke became black as pitch, and the landscape was buried in darkness—if only the moon

"They have got the fire under—they have got it under!" gasped the doctor, seized by a sudden wild

hope. "They have got out the engine at the mill and are working it. . . . They will master it, you'll see. . . . There are people enough. . . ."

But suddenly the flames shot up again—higher and higher in the air—like so many fiery tongues against the dark sky, with a shower of sparks from the burning sawdust and shavings.

The doctor breathed quickly, as if the air was too hot for him—he turned round with a gesture of despair, as if trying to shut out the sight from his eyes. . . .

The stacks of deals . . . there could be no doubt that they had caught fire. . . .

Mrs. Borvig walked despairingly round the bedroom, moaning and groaning. . . .

"My God, my God!—from sin to crime. . . ."

"Fortunate for Kjel," said the doctor, "that he is not at home to-night. He went up to town by the evening train."

"Is that true, Borvig—Borvig?" She clung convulsively to him. "And I, who suspected him!"

"Bente—be quiet, be quiet, do you hear. Are you going with me or not? . . ."

Down at the saw mill the doctor was rushing about without his coat—between and on the top of the stacks of planks directing the extinguishing of the fire, while the fire-engine was kept hard at work, and the hose was being plied in vain upon the sea of fire and flames.

His begrimed figure could be seen in the smoke and sparks among the stacks, eager in search of means and ways to stop the conflagration.

He was still there when the deals began to crackle and fall together; at last the flames drove him away.

And after the attempt had been abandoned at one point, he tried persistently to direct the work of extinguishing into the narrow passages between the stacks till the workmen refused to proceed any further into the suffocating heat, protesting that it was not a question of human life.

As the day broke the smoke lay in black, drifting clouds over the river, and the doctor could be seen in torn, scorched clothes at his hopeless work, trying to save a last small corner of the timber-yard.

XII

THE spring had been delightful, and the summer cool and pleasant. Kjel had enjoyed them to the full, sitting in his dust coat under the awning on the verandah, and had grown quite stout. His credit flourished, he was again the power absolute in the savings bank, he paid cash for every transaction, and all rumours and whisperings had subsided after the immense realisation of his stock through the fire last spring—in all nearly eighty thousand crowns, including the deals.

He had now been able to breathe freely and enjoy a holiday for nearly six months, had not been troubled by renewals of bills and by incessant journeys; had in fact been free to stretch himself and take the rest he so well needed. Only a little superintendence at the saw mill, which was now being rebuilt.

The year on the whole had been in many ways propitious to him.

It seemed as if Thekla had become more reasonable and conciliatory, not only in her ungovernable mania for demanding information and explanations, but her enthusiastic support of Dr. Stenvig had also cooled

down, so that Kjel was spared seeing him at his house more than once a week.

Next month the trouble and worry of getting names to his bills, with instalments and renewals, would begin again. He was tolerably well prepared. Occasionally, however, he had some trouble over a bill in one place, while in another persuasive or over-awing tactics would be necessary;—the fur coat and top boots would be again in requisition. But most things were so cleverly arranged that he only had the autumn instalments to settle.

Down at the mill, where they were building and sawing and hammering, Endre was to be seen in his straw hat taking his usual mid-day walk till his cigar was finished, when he would call and get some refreshment and a new Havanna at Kjel's.

“Isn't it true, Mr. Schulteiss,” he began as he overtook him on the way home, “that Mrs. Kjel always thinks in squares? But as it happens, the world is round and has both zigzag and curved lines, and so one's train of reasoning is accordingly. She is a nut-cracker, who goes up and down cracking the Whys and the Wherefores,—but the world's nuts are too hard for her. . . . Totally unsusceptible to sardonic humour—in fact, to humour of any kind . . . with no mind—for anything else but dried fish. When the newspapers refuse to take my articles—which, as a matter of fact, has happened this summer—a unanimous conspiracy, you see, because they threatened to demolish

the whole of the existing self-appointed, narrow-minded system of criticism—then I have an exit—my revolver, in case I find I have to make my choice.”

“You see, Mr. Schulteiss, I am making a special study of the waterfall down there one part of it in particular, a deep whirlpool just below the great curve of the fall. . . . I have tried to throw chips and bits of wood into it. I have watched the logs which shoot suddenly into the pool at that point. They disappear altogether and only rise to the surface after a good minute do you understand my idea?—such a creamy, whirling eddy, like frothing champagne — — one could joyfully end one’s existence in it. I gaze at it—always with my own corpse in my mind—the hat drifting down the river and a moment later the owner of it rising to the surface, lifeless as the logs—past, away—washed away by the current of life.”

Schulteiss, quite taken up by his own thoughts, put all his usual courtesy into his answers—he heard, yet heard not.

At the end of the week both his pupils, Arnt and Massy, were going up to town to enter upon a course of study at the Technical School, and he himself was leaving Elvsæt and all that he had lived for in these many strange years.

Minka was only a young girl when he had first come there, now she was preparing for her *débüt* on the world’s stage.

He would stand buried in thought on the spot where *that* conversation had taken place where her feet had rested. . . . He remembered how, before she was quite grown up, he had been the privileged one to stand by the half-hour and swing her. He called to mind her fresh laughter, and young lithe figure flying through the air, her feet stretched out before her, and how she always wanted to go a little higher still—still a little higher.

He would stand on the landing lost in self-oblivion, his eyes fixed on the door to the yellow room—waiting. That was Minka coming. . . . He would slink shyly away, or look up idiotically if any one else appeared. . . .

He stood listening heard her step on the staircase.

There was one board on the stairs which sometimes creaked and foretold her approach her step was so different from any one else's, such an index to her mind when she reached the top of the stairs, her form would shut out the dazzling light from the window at the opposite end of the landing. . . .

He would sit beside the piano, with closed eyes, his neck against the music shelf till Berthea or Massy came and wanted to play, when he would jump up as if he were in a hurry, or had forgotten something.

He would stand with bent head, wrapped in thought, on the steps outside the front door, then

he would suddenly draw himself up, and look impassioned around. . . . This was his spiritual estate—his ground: the seat on which she, in her unspeakable, ever varying beauty, had sat . . . the steps on which she had trodden.— —

His long, thin, white fingers grasped the railing, as if to hold fast against some current which he felt was washing him away.

No, he would not let himself be dragged away from that railing. He would stay so near that he could seize it again on the day when she returned.

He had been offered a position at the new judge's . . . but he would not let himself be carried away by circumstances. He had made up his mind long ago—had arranged to establish a school for bigger children on the sheriff's farm. There would then be only the grove, the summer-house hill, and the short piece of ground across the plain to get over before he could see her again.

Arnt's and Massy's trunks stood open in their rooms, ready to be packed with the new clothes which were being laid out on chairs beside them, after having been marked and ironed. Mrs. Borvig's slender figure flitted lightly up and down stairs, now with some marked linen on her arm, now with a bundle of handkerchiefs. No sooner was anything ready than she ran upstairs with it; she insisted on doing all the packing herself.

Her whole mind was taken up with the preparations for the children's departure. She would chat with Arnt; or listen attentively, as he accompanied her up and down stairs, to his enthusiastic account of the railway across the Andes, with the terrible inclines—one of forty, and one of thirty degrees. She would then begin to talk to Massy, who was so awfully tired of Endre's chaff and nonsense, and would speak openly and confidingly to her, knowing that they understood each other so well.

And Schulteiss' clothes had also to be seen to, and mended.

It was Friday, the day before he was to leave Elvsæt.

Mrs. Borvig was up in his room counting and handing him his clean linen, which he received with many profound bows and expressions of gratitude.

"So this is the last time I shall look after your clothes, Mr. Schulteiss," said Mrs. Borvig.

"Pardon me, if I cannot for the moment find the right expression for your never-to-be-forgotten kindness."

He looked up at her with a pained, unhappy expression.

"When people have lived so much of their life together as we, Mr. Schulteiss, and have both given and taken, we know quite well that each is beholden to the other. You have shared so much anxiety

with me all these years," said Mrs. Borvig, after a pause. "I shall miss that also—many a word in confidence."

"It has been part of my poor joy—my real" burst out Schulteiss, struggling to keep back his emotion.

"You understand one so well—it is that which has been such a comfort. . . . And—and—" she sighed, "one has so many anxieties, Mr. Schulteiss. . . . Borvig is not getting any better. . . . It seems as if his strength is failing him—he seems to be running down. . . . Don't you think he is very much changed, Mr. Schulteiss, that he has become very thin? I am afraid he is more ill than he will admit—his system received a shock at the fire last spring. . . . Oh, how relieved I should feel if I could see him now and then fly into a passion as he used. He is so strangely indifferent, has lost all interest. It quite worries him if I speak to him about the children. . . . And then the two youngest who are going away"—Mrs. Borvig sighed as she sat down with some linen in her lap—"he seems to take no interest in them either. . . . And I have such bright hopes of them—feel more sure of them."

"Yes, indeed, Mrs. Borvig, their abilities are considerably above the average, and both are of a persevering nature."

"Yes, dear Mr. Schulteiss, you have given them the best a teacher can give—an intellectual education.

You are, in many respects, one of those rare, genial teachers to whom pupils will remain grateful all their lives. But I should like to say something; it seems as if the desires and exigencies of life during all the intellectual development and the great prospects of the possibilities of the time so easily lead people astray. Look at Endre for instance Arnt and Massy on the other hand I have tried to keep close to reality—have confided in them, have not kept our daily troubles and difficulties from them—what we call sorrows, which children are supposed not to know anything about; they know quite well what are the failings of their brothers and sisters.”

“H’m—with regard to Miss Minka, Mrs. Borvig—excuse me but I really think she will justify even the highest expectations.”

“There is so much *future* in the air, Mr. Schulteiss, that a young person who grows up inhaling that air *must* become deranged. But reality is hard, full of competition, and blocked for all the weak and indolent. . . . It is not wisdom, but the bitter experience of my life which has taught me this. I also once thought one had only to jump into it all.”

“Quite right, Mrs. Borvig,” he gasped under his breath, “only as far as Miss Minka is concerned I must make a reservation.”

“Yes, of course, Mr. Schulteiss. You see it’s the fashion now for every one to have a vocation, and that is all well and good! But so many wish to be geniuses

—to become famous. And so they get into trouble and become unhappy. It is my great hope—and in this I wish so much that you would support me, Mr. Schulteiss—that she will soon get rid of these aspirations. I think, however, you will agree with me that she had to go out into the world to test her illusions, they had become too deeply rooted in her.”

“Mrs. Borvig, excuse me, but for such an ideal nature as Minka’s the new age with its many currents may be expected to free her latent powers and in truth—here may be the opportunity to uphold the right of her exceptional talent as borne out by history, to open up new careers. . . .”

“Poor poor Schulteiss,” said Mrs. Borvig to herself as she went downstairs “he is quite mad about everything that concerns Minka.”

They had been busy the whole afternoon till it was time to go down to supper. Massy sat on her trunk which had just been shut down, ready for the departure next morning.

“Well, I can go away now with six good consciences, mother.”

Massy began to count them on her fingers, checking them off one by one:

“I have passed my middle school examination.

“Have got on as far as necessary with mathematics.

“And with perspectives.

“Always looked after my housekeeping week so

well that you have never once had to help me, mother—that you must acknowledge—except when I went up for my examination.

“Learnt to swim this summer.

“And now I’ve finished with my sewing and paid all my farewell calls.”

“Yes, Massy, always be practical you are beginning in a new era. And remember it will be what *you* make it. . . . It is a great responsibility, you see. I must tell you, Massy, old as I am, and weary as I have often been, I would gladly live my life over again in this new era and do my best to bring quite a different strength, efficiency and joy into life, than what we have—and get many of your good consciences brought into play.”

XIII

CHRISTMAS passed with a succession of parties, all of which the doctor punctiliously attended ; but pressing duties were always put forth as an excuse for leaving early in the evening.

It was a relief to find himself back in his sledge again, to look out upon the mountain ridges and tree-tops on the horizon in the moonlight with the snow gently falling.

To sit there, lost in the monotony of the horse's jog-trot, while the sledge-runners creaked as they glided over the ground, burying himself deeper and deeper in his fur collar till he could only see the gleam of a star high above him or feel the touch of a snowflake which found its way down to his face, and thus forget everything around him.

The only place where he could take a nap was in the sledge, while the horse trotted steadily along, where he could sleep without fear of dreaming and starting up.

The year had come to a close with New Year's Eve. The river was murmuring in the starlit evening under its white covering of snow, with black spaces

near the mill, where the fall was foaming amidst ice-pillars and clusters of icicles.

Lights were burning in the windows down at Kjel's house, which was illuminated in honour of the new saw-mill which had just been completed and enlarged.

Thekla, little Baard, and Kjel had driven up on a short visit to Elvsæt, where New Year's Eve was being kept quietly. The doctor himself had returned home late from his patients.

He was tired—did not offer to take little Baard on his knee, but sat absorbed, following his movements with his eyes as he sipped his glass of stout. His wife had proposed that he should drink this in the evenings on account of his increasing insomnia. When Kjel and his wife were leaving he took Baard's hands, looked long at them, and kissed them both.

Long after the sledge had disappeared down the hill, and the sound of the bells was lost, the doctor stood at the door looking after them.

Mrs. Borvig lay listening to the distant strokes of the clock down in the kitchen as it struck twelve. . . . The New Year had begun!

It seemed to her that Borvig was restless and uneasy, and breathed heavily.

"Yes, the New Year, Bente," he said. "I was just thinking how differently the New Year can begin for some of us as long as there is hope and enjoyment

and all that ; but then look how many people there are around us who think it is only a new millstone round their neck. . . . But remember, Bente, that everything—everything—depends upon one's courage. One must not let oneself be trodden down as long as there is a spark of hope or prospect left—something—only something to live for !”

“It is such a relief to hear you talk like that, Borvig.”

“As long as there is anything at all left to fight for—the smallest shred—I beg you to remember that, Bente—even if I should forget it at any time—You see,” he said, after a pause, “I cannot get it out of my head. . . . These poor creatures round about us here and there to-night who feel they have nothing at all left to struggle for—because they have been bereft of hope—and then, ugh!—to take a whole year again upon their shoulders !”

“Ah! it's only because you are in low spirits, Borvig, that you lie there brooding. . . .”

“Some may have a secret crime upon their conscience. And there may be many in the world to-night in trouble about their conscience,” he muttered, sighing deeply. . . .

“When one has lived many years and has had one's eyes opened to the amount of unknown sorrow and suffering this world can contain, when one has driven about in one's practice and seen people illuminating their windows to welcome the New Year—then one

cannot avoid such thoughts. . . . And such a criminal I mean one who has committed something serious, say, for instance, a murder who knows that if he confessed it would be the ruin and misery of all his beloved ones—he is really in a strange position—confined, so to speak, within four silent walls, in solitary imprisonment for life, within himself—he need not be condemned and transported, no — — suppose he had a wife, whom he loved as dearly as his life, and children to bring up”

“For shame, Borvig! how unpleasant to talk like this on New Year’s Eve.”

“You must be forbearing with me, Bente; I can’t sleep till I have said what is on my mind. . . . He could not confide in his wife—could not tell her that he was a murderer—he would lose her innermost esteem from that moment.— And even if he could retain her love—”

“That might easily happen, Borvig.—It depends a good deal—”

“Well, even in such a case you see—he could not love her much if he made her a sharer in his crime; made her his silent accomplice, who also would be unable to look people in the face, and who would live in continual fear of discovery, and the shame and ruin it would bring upon herself and hers, and be exposed to the risk of becoming the wife of a convict, mother to a convict’s children. He would have placed the burden of the crime upon the one he loved

best in the world, the one he would sacrifice everything for. . . . So you see no confidence would be possible there, no confidante for him any longer. He is shut out—shut out of the garden of Paradise—compelled to remain silent. It is like the threatening angel— that *is* so, Bente. Such people are terribly to be pitied!”

“Borvig dear, do take a little soda or naphtha—you lie there tossing about, a prey to such despairing thoughts, I am almost afraid your mind is wandering.”

“Oh no, no, Bente. The best thing for me is to let me have my say out . . . for I know that then I shall sleep and not before . . . Then there is this, you know . . . the poor wife could never really forgive him for having in this way darkened her whole life—made her his companion in crime. She might perhaps love him ; but forgive him from the bottom of her heart—no. . . . Mortals cannot forgive such things . . . That is why forgiveness is placed so high in religion, as high as the sun above us. . . . And so, you see—to him—to such poor unfortunate creatures—New Year’s Eve is like a dark wall—it’s no use illuminating *there*. . . . To them the last spark of hope has expired—disappeared. . . . That may be called New Year’s Eve misery, Bente. . . . And now I think I can go to sleep . . . Just see if all the lights are out down at Kjel’s. . . .”

Then suddenly he pressed her convulsively to him, put his arms round her and kissed her.

On New Year's morning the doctor stood in his fur coat before his medicine cupboard searching for something, before he got into the sledge. He had to visit a patient suffering from nervous fever, and was in a hurry to get away before the New Year's congratulations began.

He scanned the windows carefully as he drove away from home, stopped at the turn of the road just outside the gate, and sat looking back at the house till the farm lad wondered if he had forgotten anything—lifted his fur cap a little, whipped up the horse and set off down the hill at great speed.

Later in the morning the sitting room at Elvsæt was filled with New Year visitors. . . . Sledges of all sizes, with jingling bells and bear and wolfskin rugs, stood in a row in front of the house along the road, which was piled on each side with snow. The neighbouring families had all dropped in after church. They were wishing the doctor's family and each other a happy New Year, and were partaking of wine and cake, while Endre made a most eloquent deputy for his father. He did not make use of the hackneyed New Year greetings, but varied his expressions and introduced brightness and seasonable good humour into the conversation.

His store was still unexhausted when at two o'clock the last visitors who had tarried behind, drove away down the hill, and he had good-humouredly ensconced

himself behind their sledge to continue the New Year visits down at Kjel's.

On the way down the hill he met his father's horse and sledge driven by some one, but in his exuberant condition he did not give the matter a thought.

Mrs. Borvig knew the horse and went to the door to receive Borvig ; she had felt so anxious and uneasy since last night.

It struck her as strange that she did not hear any sledge bells, and that the sledge, contrary to the doctor's custom, stopped in the middle of the yard instead of outside the door.

When a strange man stepped out of it her blood seemed suddenly to turn to ice in her veins, and she had to support herself by the railing* to go down the steps.

Kjel and Endre were gone to bring home their father.

The doctor—such was the sad news—had suddenly met his death—he had been overtaken by an attack of heart disease, or nervous apoplexy, just as he had partaken of a glass of ice-cold water after having attended to his patient.

Along the passage to the girls' bedroom could be heard Berthea's sobs, and now and then a loud wail. . . .

In the window of the yellow room Mrs. Borvig stood alone in the darkness.

She had stood there since the twilight set in, rigid, motionless. . . .

She again heard his voice, his words of the night before—each word as it fell—heavily . . . with a sigh.

It was all clear to her now.

She saw the flames down at the mill, seething, licking, consuming . . . wailing woe—woe, out into the still air. . . .

She looked fixedly before her like one turned into stone.

Outside were heard the creaking of a sledge as it cautiously drew up to the door, and subdued voices.

The front door was opened slowly and the men carried the doctor silently up the stairs.

Mrs. Borvig stood motionless while they placed him on a couch in the yellow room . . . she turned round—and stared. . . .

Her sons had gone downstairs.

Then she glided softly over to his side and placed her face close to that of the dead, chin to chin—benumbed—tearless. . . .

XIV

THE summer passed quietly and monotonously at Elvsæt.

There were no arrivals or departures of the doctor in his kariol, no strict orders and injunctions as to what should be done inside and outside the house. No kariols or carriages came driving up the hill with casual callers, no patients came to the door to ask for the doctor.

In the study everything was unchanged; the doctor's pipes and surgical instruments were all in their old place, his portable case as usual on the right hand side of his writing-table.

The land belonging to the farm had been let till the autumn, when the property would be sold. Mrs. Borvig in the meantime managed the housekeeping and the garden. Now and then there came letters from Arnt and Massy. Mrs. Borvig had invested the rest of the money she had inherited for their education; and questions were asked and answered in long anxious letters as to how the money could best be applied.

Her steps were still to be heard, only more hushed

than before, pacing up and down the desolate yellow room, which, with the furniture spread about, the long unpainted table, and household articles, looked almost like a lumber room.

“As long as there was a spark of hope—something to live for,” Borvig had said.

That was the silent burden which, like the river, was not heard in the day, but which grew into a roar in her mind in the lonely hours she spent beside the window in the yellow room.

Minka. . . .

This summer, since she returned home, she had been walking about, a living enigma to her mother—a flickering hope. . . . Minka—the child of her heart, upon whom she had set such store these many years whom she had loved even to weakness—the loss of whom she felt she could not endure. . . .

Ever since Minka's return Mrs. Borvig had been painfully conscious that her daughter had been affected by her late surroundings, and the influences she had been subjected to. . . . This dreamy subsidence into her own self. . . . The senses apparently impaired and unfit for the limits and considerations of everyday reality—befogged, affected self-conceit. . . . She returned, as it were, with something clinging to her from another atmosphere, full of imbecile theories and notions. . . .

So uncontrollably nervous in her speech, sensitive in every fibre. . . .

She should now stay at home the whole summer, to rest and gain strength regain her beautiful nature, regain the balance of her mind.

In the autumn, yes! in the autumn when the home at Elvsæt would be broken up. . . .

Then every effort must be made; Minka must give lessons in music, while she herself kept house for her children up in town.

And Berthea with her deplorable giddiness should be sent to a school to learn household management.

Minka carefully avoided meeting Schulteiss—in fact could not bear to see him; her nerves were quite uncontrollable in his presence. From the first moment she had met him again she had notice something deranged about him; a look had betrayed it and filled her with terror—she could not endure the thought that he was watching and spying her steps—a feeling of insecurity took possession of her, and she would scream with fear if anything merely moved behind a fence or bush.

And Schulteiss went spying and prowling about in the roads and woodlands between the sheriff's and Elvsæt. He must get a glimpse at Minka. . . .

He would stand absorbed, wrapped up in himself, among the trees in the grove—waiting in the certainty that she would appear in the course of the day—oblivious to the rain, the damp ground on which he stood, and the time. . . . He was talking with

Minka, was discussing some of his great ideas with her—was in spiritual communion with her whispering to her, adoring and worshipping her in his imagination.

In happy, lonely hours of abstraction, his eyes would twinkle mysteriously, he would smile before the looking-glass mumbling to himself about spiritual trysts about Minka, who never gave herself away.

Berthea appeared one morning at breakfast with her eyes red with weeping, and a swollen face.

There was nothing the matter with her—nothing at all—only a tooth-ache.

In the course of the morning, she set off to the letter-box at the railway station, with a thick letter in her pocket, which she had written during the night. It was addressed to Mr. Ole Berg, Iowa City, Iowa, U.S.A.

She surprised every one by remaining at home during the whole month of July.

And then one day a letter came.

The frequently rejected, yet faithful lover of her schooldays, Ole, the sheriff's son, had answered her letter by return: "Come, come to my open arms!"

And now she must get the money for the journey from Kjel or her mother—she must—she *must*— —

She left behind her on her departure, an impression

of being a complication of insolvable enigmas, which would long have occupied the divining proclivities of the parish, if suddenly the attention had not wholly and effectually been engrossed by the rumours of new failures among the owners of the Black Forest, and by nothing less than the question whether Kjel Borvig's affairs should be put under administration.

All sorts of rumours were in circulation.

It was stated on good authority that Mrs. Kjel had suddenly driven up to the judge's, and asked to be allowed to account for things as far as she was concerned, had given a complete list of her furs, silk dresses and jewellery—everything in her possession. She had only desisted when she was told that the preliminary statement of affairs which Kjel had produced, showed a surplus of no less than sixty thousand crowns.

When Endre, contrary to his usual quiet ways, noisily burst in upon them at home with a report of these rumours, his mother did not utter a word of surprise.

That which now would cause trouble and anxiety to others, was a matter of the past to her—she had long ago fought it all out and resigned herself: She had suffered and gone through all that could possibly happen . . . and much more.

“As long as there is still a spark of hope—remember that above all, Bente,” Borvig had said. . . .

She must now take care of what she had left.

She felt more and more how difficult it was to get to the bottom of Minka's nature.

So tender, so full of lovable understanding for the moment, it seemed always to be a case of beginning over again. And when it devolved upon her to take a decision, she faltered and slunk away.

She now rather avoided those confidential moments when something might be guardedly broached about future plans and prospects; on these occasions such a mysterious pained expression always came into her face.

Of late she had become so restless, so abrupt in her manners; would start as if frightened and answer timidly if spoken to. She had received many letters, and had written many.

Although Mrs. Borvig had never had an opportunity of seeing the handwriting on the envelopes, she understood it was Varberg she was corresponding with.

And now she heard he had returned to the neighbourhood, and lodged with the station-master.

He had apparently again succeeded in inveigling Minka into this unfortunate hypnotic mysticism.

This fascination—which had begun by stupefying or exalting a single bent of her will, and had gone on uprooting her whole being and destroying all character and independence—*must* end with the murder of a soul! In her despair, she saw 'Minka

before her, a medium—devoid of all will—the victim of an experimenter—acting upon his promptings—a wandering corpse. . . .

Kjel came slowly up the steps to the front door, stopping from time to time, lost in thought.

He searched through all the rooms for his mother, walking as if quite dazed, and stopped at last outside the still-room, fumbling with the door. . . .

He heard Mrs. Borvig's voice in the mangling-room, where she and Minka were sorting and putting all the linen in order ready for the removal.

As Mrs. Borvig saw him come stumbling into the room, her face became stiff and rigid, and overspread by a sudden pallor.

He righted himself up against the wall, and moaned aloud ; it was like the suppressed bellowing of a bull.

"Bankrupt, mother!—Summoned to appear at three o'clock this afternoon—about the savings bank," he burst out disjointedly. "And—and this evening I shall be arrested—I know it. . . ."

He leant heavily forward, as if he could not support his body ; his face was livid, his eyes placid and full of fear—he gaped idiotically.

"All is going wrong—mother," he growled in a hollow voice. "I had to come straight away from home."

Endre came in ; he was already aware of the catastrophe.

"Here is a glass of brandy—of your own sort, Kjel—you need it. . . ."

Kjel turned it aside with a languid movement.

"You must pull yourself together—no—not even taste it? One must know how to meet one's fate like a man—whatever it may be—at any rate show a front, you know; don't collapse altogether—except at death's door," he added, theatrically.

"Penal servitude—without a doubt penal servitude!" ejaculated Kjel, hoarsely.

"Here, drink some water, Kjel," said his mother. "Lie down—sit down in the chair there. . . ."

He gulped down some water.

"This afternoon, mother—this after——" he muttered, his hand trembling so violently that she had to take the glass from him.

"You mustn't let yourself be so overcome, Kjel," said his mother, stroking his face and hair absent-mindedly, while he panted heavily. "Don't give way like this. . . . Your mother, who has borne and nursed you, Kjel, will not desert you."

"Penal—penal servitude!" muttered Kjel, gulping down the words.

He sat stupefied, with his head drooping, while his mother wiped his brow.

Endre began pacing up and down with folded arms.

"There are moments, decisive moments, when it is necessary to survey the situation—attempt to be

master of it. . . . When the ordinary conventional ideas no longer apply to one—when a man has got outside the pale of society, so to speak—then one must look at it from that standpoint—must choose extraordinary means.” He turned round. “You understand me, Kjel—I advise you to make up your mind to leave, to flee the country—bury your existence somewhere on the other side of the Atlantic— —for your own sake and that of the family. . . .”

Kjel looked up with a dull stare. His expression told that any idea of prompt and vigorous action was out of the question.

Endre threw himself down on the bench against the wall, kicking savagely in his excitement.

“As matters now stand, one could almost be tempted to take some bold stroke at once—to give Arnt’s dynamite cartridges in the lumber-room in there a blow with the axe become desperate—do the worst. . . .”

He stared at Kjel for a moment.

“I say, Kjel, I, your brother, will go with you this afternoon into court. I mean to defy public opinion.”

Minka from time to time started up fitfully, and then sat down again with her hands before her eyes—stared in trembling dismay at the broken down, helpless figure of her brother.

She seemed to be trying to shut out some dread

vision with her hand. Suddenly with a wail she burst out:

"I may as well speak out about myself. . . . I must tell you, mother.—I could not bring myself to distress you with it.—But now . . . well, I have said yes to Varberg! . . . I cannot help it—nor do I wish it otherwise," she exclaimed in a state of nervous excitability. "I want to follow him, I tell you, mother.—I have bound myself to him. . . . He is to be my *impresario*, and we will give *séances* all over the world. Through me, as his medium, he will open the way for the new truths."

The expression of Mrs. Borvig's eyes all at once assumed that of a lynx.

"How you look at me, mother . . . I must tell you, that it has already been settled between Varberg and me, since early this summer. . . . It is a gift I have. He can develop my particular faculty. . . . I must follow my calling."

Mrs. Borvig stood as if paralysed—her face pale with despair. A shadow of madness came over her face.

She heard again the "woe, woe" . . . long wailings in the air, like a supernatural shriek.

She saw Minka sitting talking, and striking out with her arms like an automatic puppet, distorted—creaking of emptiness.

And there was Endre with no future before him, walking about preaching dynamite.

Then suddenly she saw Kjel before her with the convict's collar of iron round his neck. . . .

A sudden dizziness seized her; the burden was too overwhelming—it was more than Arnt and Massy, as the bearers of Borvig's name, could endure. . . . Mrs. Borvig looked slowly and fixedly from one to the other of her three children with an ominous, strange expression. . . .

Her rigid face became ashy grey, corpse-like, as she glided into the lumber-room.

She quietly searched among Arnt's things for his tin box, with the dynamite cartridges, which he had hidden away, then seized the axe, and with a wild cry of terror struck the fatal blow. . . .

At a quarter to eleven that morning the people of the parish were startled by a violent explosion at Elvsæt.

The calamity, it was believed, must have happened through the accidental ignition of some dynamite, which had been kept in the house.

The whole of one side of the house was laid in ruins, and among the logs and splinters lay four crushed bodies—those of Mrs. Borvig and her three grown-up children.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

Uniform with this Volume.

Cloth, 3s. 6d.; Paper, 2s. 6d.

THE COMMODORE'S DAUGHTERS.

“In ‘The Commodore’s Daughters’ we are taken to a seaport in Norway, and there introduced to the family of the Commodore, consisting of the Commodore himself, his wife, two daughters, and a son. The history of their lives for the next ten years follows—a history full of pathos. . . . The book is undeniably true to life.”—*The Guardian*.

LONDON: WM. HEINEMANN,
21 BEDFORD STREET, W.C.

